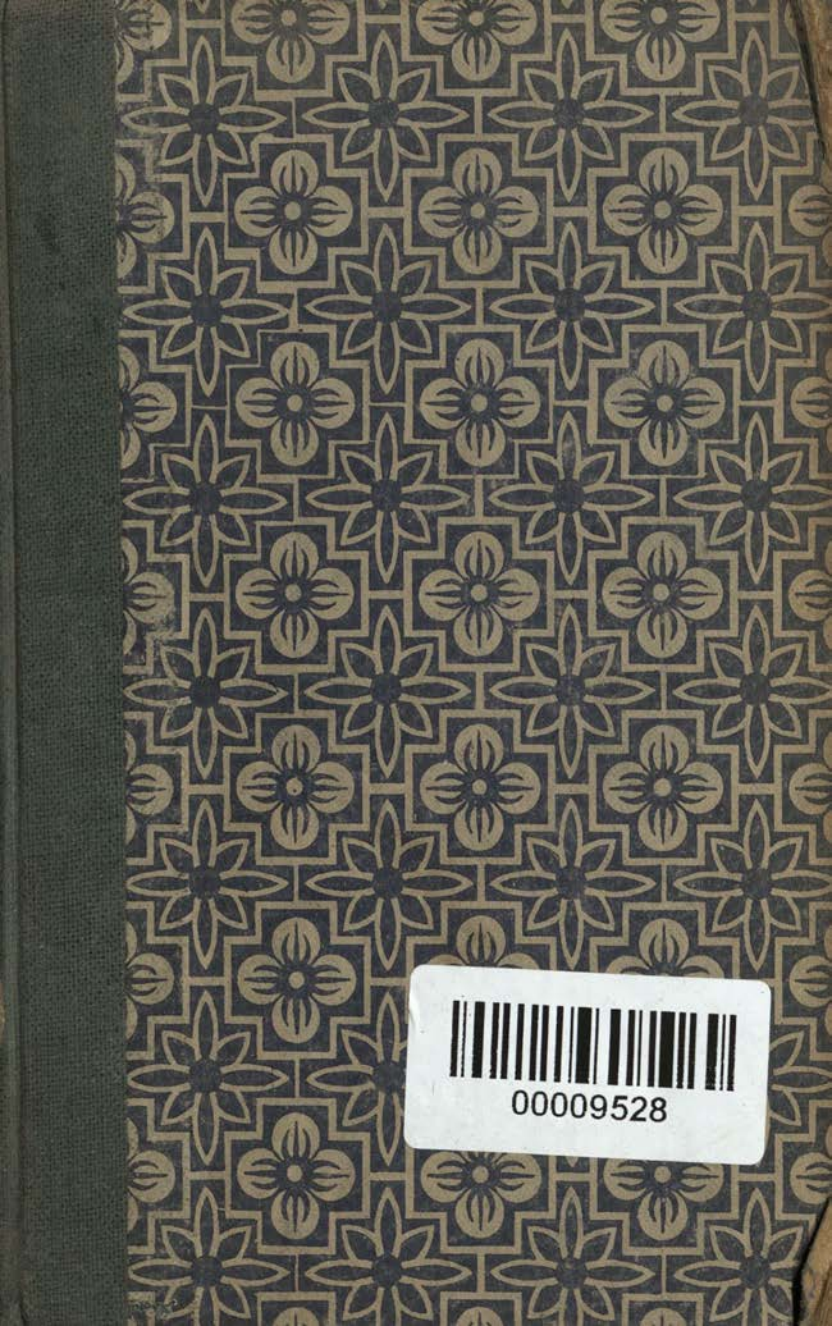
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BUTCHER'S DOZEN

his first anthology by members of The Crime
ters Association includes thrillers, detective
es and suspense stories to cover the widest
ible range of style and to cater for all tastes. It
shows the versatility and ingenuity of the modern
e writer.

BUTCHER'S DOZEN

An Anthology

by

THE CRIME WRITERS ASSOCIATION

4796

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INTRODUCTION

1

THE first meeting of The Crime Writers Association was held on November 5th, 1953, at the National Liberal Club, when a dozen writers responded to an invitation from John Creasey to discuss several problems of their art and craft; among them the idea of forming an association.

The project was approved, and the C.W.A. came into being. It is still an infant, but a lusty one. In its short term of life the C.W.A. has run a Crime Book Exhibition, arranged a newspaper competition to find new crime stories—and produced this Anthology.

2

What can you expect to find in this Anthology, and why is it here? The committee responsible for choosing the stories had to make up its mind about certain things. Should the collection be confined to *detective stories*, pure though by no means simple? Or should the range be widened to include all varieties of *crime stories*—that is, stories in which the criminal element is of first importance, but which do not necessarily contain any puzzle, nor indeed any detection? Then, what should be the limits of length? Should a story of five hundred words, however ingenious, be rejected as too short? Would one of twenty thousand be so long that it would tip the balance of the collection?

After much discussion these problems were resolved. A wide approach was preferred. All kinds of stories may be found here, from thrillers like Maurice Procter's 'Diamonds for the Million' to pure detective stories like Josephine Bell's 'Thimble River Mystery'; from suspense stories like Janet Green's 'The Tallest Man in the World' to psychological studies like Julian Symons's 'The Dupe'; from deliberately shocking stories like Cecil M. Wills's 'The Lost Village' to such a quiet tale of English country life as Marjorie Alan's 'Portrait of Eleanor'. Variety is surely a good thing: and it is equally surely true that, as a contributor to the *Times Literary Supplement's* special supplement on the detective story remarked, "The classic detective story of the 1920s, the 'whodunit' with the closed circle of suspects and the static setting, is becoming a jaded form."

The question of length was a more difficult one, in relation particularly to very short stories. The 'short-short story', as it is technically called, is a recognised modern form, and several excellent stories were submitted of less than two thousand words in length. Yet, in spite of their excellence, these stories seemed too short for inclusion in a book. There was a breathlessness about them, a sense that a great deal had to be packed into a very little space. This feeling of urgency may make such stories especially suitable for newspaper and magazine publication, but it does not make for satisfying reading between covers.

3

It is not possible to have a hand in the selection of such an Anthology without being led into some thoughts about the market for crime stories in this country. It

must be said that upon the whole the outlook is bleak. The short-short story is firmly established, and has received generous encouragement, in particular from the *Evening Standard*: but for the story of 5,000 and 10,000 words (and it is between these lengths, upon the whole, that the crime writer has in the past worked most brilliantly) there are few possible markets. If the reader (who, in the long run, controls the popular markets) imagines that he is better off without such stories, let him cast his mind back no further than Reggie Fortune. Is life today a better thing, lacking his buttered crumpets and his Persian cats?

Even in such markets as there are, the writer is likely to meet with some curious restrictions. It is not unknown for some magazine editors to commission stories with a few words of advice that would have surprised Conan Doyle or G. K. Chesterton. "An attractive hero, and quite a strong love interest, if you please. Murder, of course, but nothing gruesome. Two murders would be acceptable. And some kind of professional setting would suit us very well. Now, as to characters . . ."

Editors have to consider their public. This is no more than a plea that they should look also for the daring, the adventurous, the experimental story; forsaking, if only occasionally, the story written to formula. And who constructs the formulæ, anyway? Today's story written to successful formula is tomorrow's flop. There are some stories in this book which have not appeared in magazines—which, in the present state of the market, *could not* appear in magazines, for reasons that have nothing to do with their literary merit. This is an unfortunate situation, although it has the saving grace that some stories are presented which (most unusually for Anthologies) appear here in print for the first time.

A final word. This Anthology is a corporate act of

The Crime Writers Association, designed to show the versatility and ingenuity of the modern crime writer. But you, the reader, will rightly judge it simply as entertainment. We hope and believe that there is much in the pages to follow that will suit the widely differing tastes of addicts. Enough of prologue. Go to.

Josephine Bell
Michael Gilbert
Julian Symons

Portrait of Eleanor

MARJORIE ALAN

I'D heard about Gramercy from Madge Mayhew ever since I was so high. I knew about its beamed and panelled rooms; the oak stairway with treads so narrow that the foot must step sideways on them; the dim, windowless chamber huddled into the thickness of the great central chimney and reached only by a secret opening in the panelling, where once—tradition insisted—Charles the Second had spent a cramped and anxious afternoon while Roundhead soldiers scoured the woods around. I knew about the date—1588—and the one word GRAMERCY carved deep into the hearthstone, and the tale that some old seafarer of the first Elizabeth's day, home for good after that hazardous brush with the might of Spain, had built him a house where he could look down the length of a wooded valley to the sea, and had given expression to his gratitude for life and liberty in the name he chose to call it by.

Gramercy had been a treasured legend to me since childhood, and when Madge mentioned casually, on that gusty March afternoon, that Colonel Mayhew wanted to let it furnished if he could find a careful tenant, I looked at Bill and found him looking at me as though somebody had dangled a slice of heaven in front of us.

"We're pretty careful people," I said to Madge. "Do you think . . . ?" and saw her grey eyes warm suddenly to the idea.

"Why, of course," she said, "it'd be the very thing. Why on earth didn't I think of it? Wait here while I telephone Uncle Bernard."

We waited, sitting one on each side of the fire in her rather bleak little sitting-room, not daring to speak to each other of the possibility, lest words should break a lovely dream. But the angel who deals with the prayers of house-hunting newly-marrieds must have been in a kindly mood on that gusty March afternoon, for Madge came back quite soon, smiling with satisfaction.

"It's all right," she said. "He hasn't let it yet, and I've told him you'll go and see it." She added, "It really is a nice old place and the garden's a joy." Her voice was wistful as she spoke, and I knew she was coveting that garden for her Andrew who had come back from the war minus an arm and with one lung refusing to do any of the things that it should. With a delicate husband, two school-age children and very little money, Madge was finding life an uphill business, though she would never have admitted it. Colonel Mayhew, the owner of Gramercy, was Andrew's uncle, and I think he would have helped them through those not-too-easy times, but Andrew was too proud to accept charity, even from a relative and one as wealthy as Colonel Mayhew. "Stephen sucks up to him," had been his final verdict the only time he and Madge had discussed the matter, "and I'm darned if I'll follow in Cousin Stephen's footsteps!" Between the two nephews who were Colonel Mayhew's only living relatives, little love had ever been lost.

I asked Madge, "Do you think we could go along and see the house right away?" and she said, "Why not?" and added, twinkling a little, "As a matter of fact I told Uncle Bernard to expect you in about an hour."

As we were packing ourselves into the car Bill asked

her, "Why does he want to let the house? I thought he was only just home from abroad."

"He is," she said, "but the place has unhappy memories for him. His only daughter died there in rather tragic circumstances last year while he was away. I think he feels he just can't bear to live there for a while, and Stephen and Anna agree with him."

"Anna?" I queried. The name was new to me.

She stood back as Bill switched on the engine. "Eleanor's companion. She married Stephen soon after Eleanor died, and they live with the old man to keep him company."

And then we were on our way.

That old Elizabethan who built Gramercy out of his heart's gratitude built well. Fashioned of mellowed brick, and oak-timbered; set among tranquil lawns and borders of roses and lavender; sheltered on the east by a copse of oak and beech, and looking down a magnificent valley to open sea beyond, it was a small but lovely jewel in a perfect setting.

Colonel Mayhew showed us round, and for the first time I saw the rooms which I had heard about as a child, walked up the narrow stairs, was shown the simple but effective device which screened the entrance to the chimney corner, as they called the hidden room. Not until we had seen the rest of the house did he take us into the library, where a blazing log fire was sending little shadows to chase the last of the daylight from obscure corners.

It was a room about eighteen feet square, running from front to back of the house, with a bay window looking towards the sea, and a great open fireplace, to the left of which a smaller, circular window gave a colourful glimpse of garden.

Colonel Mayhew saw me looking at it. "The one alteration I made to the house," he told me, smiling. "I enjoy sitting here in the evening and watching the shadow of that oak spread across the grass."

"I shall enjoy it too," I said impulsively. "That is," I added, "if you'll let us rent the house."

"I hope you will," he said gravely. "It'll be safe with you." And as I began a reassurance he went on quickly, "Oh, I don't mean that you won't burn holes in the carpets or spill cocktails on the furniture, but that you'll keep the place happy." He glanced up at a huge, heavily-framed portrait above the fireplace. "It was to have belonged to my daughter," he said.

The fire had dulled to a red glow; the room was tranquil with the passive expectancy of evening. I took a step or two forward to see the portrait more clearly, and Colonel Mayhew, moving beside me, lighted four candles that were set in a pair of branching silver sconces on the wide mantelpiece beneath it. It was by their kindly light that I had my first clear sight of Eleanor Mayhew.

Her father shifted one candlestick slightly so that the light fell fully on her face. "She had an accident when she was a child," he said, "and was never able to walk afterwards." He added, "My nephew Stephen painted that portrait for me only a few weeks before she died."

She was sitting in a wheel-chair, wearing a dress of a deep soft blue, out of which her neck rose white and slender to support a small head crowned with a coronet of smooth dark hair. A light silk rug was across her knees, falling in graceful folds to hide her feet, and beside the chair—actually part of one arm of it—was a shelf or narrow table of grained, polished wood on which were a miscellaneous assortment of things. I

remember noticing vaguely that there were some books and several other things, but I paid very little attention to the table's contents the first time I saw the portrait. It was Eleanor's face that startled and held me. She was sitting easily, leaning back in the chair with her hands loosely folded in her lap, but, meeting her eyes in the mild unsteady candlelight, it was as though she reached out and gripped my shoulder. I only just stopped myself saying soothingly, "Yes, my dear; what is it?" Instead I said futilely to Colonel Mayhew, "She was very young."

"Nineteen," he said. "She never reached her twentieth birthday," and then, from the abrupt movement of his head, I realised that someone else had come into the room. "My nephew, Dr. Stephen Dale," he said, and I found myself shaking hands with a tall, thin-faced man whose lips looked as if they would crack if they tried to smile.

"I see you are examining my portrait of my cousin," he said. And as Colonel Mayhew moved away to speak to Bill, he added softly, "I'm afraid that her dying as she did has broken my uncle up badly."

I looked up at the portrait, and Eleanor looked down at me. "How did she die?" I asked.

It seemed to me that he hesitated for a moment. "My uncle may have told you that she was never able to walk since she was quite small. While he was abroad her old nurse whom she idolised died suddenly and the shock of it unbalanced her mind. We found her lying on the terrace one morning; she must have tried to get from her bed to the window-seat and fallen. It was a terrible tragedy, particularly as my uncle was on the point of coming home. My wife and I do all we can for him, but he'll never get over it, I'm afraid. That's the main reason why we want him to leave this house for a while."

One of the candles flickered, and he crossed the room and switched on the electric light. "My uncle lives mentally in the Middle Ages," he said, and his thin lips stretched into something approaching a smile. "The house really *is* quite civilised." In the radiance of electricity the four candles burned bravely and uselessly; Dr. Dale bent forward and blew them out, one after another, and from each as he extinguished it there rose a thin, slow spiral of smoke. I remember I was thinking that they looked like incense rising briefly to Eleanor, when the door opened and a woman came into the room. She was very beautifully dressed in severe black that showed off the slim suppleness of her figure and the almost childlike fairness of her skin. She carried herself well and she knew how to walk—which so few women do today—but she had the coldest, most pitiless eyes of anyone I'd ever seen.

Dr. Dale introduced her to me, "My wife . . ." and I remembered Madge's words, "*Anna . . . Eleanor's companion. She married Stephen soon after Eleanor died.*" Involuntarily I glanced from that cold, remote and lovely face to Eleanor's painted features, and once again it was as though the Eleanor of the portrait reached out and gripped me by the arm.

Bill and I moved into Gramercy three weeks later, on an April day of sun and shadow, rain and rainbow. The days were still cold although the month was more than half-spent, and of an evening we were thankful enough to draw our chairs up to the library's log fire with the leaping flames teasing the shadows and Eleanor looking down on us from her great gilt frame. Even as early as that I was always acutely aware of her whenever I went into the library, but it wasn't until we had lived in Gramercy for nearly a month that it occurred to me to

wonder what had been in her mind as she sat for her portrait.

A trivial enough incident it was that put that query into my mind. Bill's father came to spend the day with us one Sunday. The old man has always been a keen amateur photographer and he spent the morning taking photographs of the house and the garden, until finally, just as I was dishing up lunch, he called me to come out into the garden and be taken "to finish up the spool". I shed my apron and came, but the result, when he sent it to us, was pretty grim, I must admit.

"The Soul's Awakening, gone a trifle sour," said Bill pleasantly, peering at it over my shoulder.

"I wonder I didn't have flames spouting out of my ears," I retorted with feeling. "Just as he was taking it I remembered that I'd left the cat loose in the kitchen with the cold chicken!"

We were in the library at the time, and as I spoke I glanced up and met Eleanor's eyes. It seemed to me—not for the first time—that there was a desperate appeal in them, and with that photograph and the incident of the cat and the cold chicken in the forefront of my mind, it occurred to me to wonder what *she* could have been thinking of, while Stephen painted her, to cause that expression.

I said something of the sort to Bill, who wasn't particularly interested.

"She went batty before she died, didn't she? She looks a bit batty there. If it's going to upset you we'll have the portrait down."

But it didn't upset me. It interested me; it intrigued me; in some queer way it pulled me, though I didn't know towards what.

And I didn't find out until Madge came to Gramercy at the end of June.

I hadn't seen her since that March afternoon when she first told us that Gramercy was to be let. She was looking tired and worried: Andrew, I gathered, was working much too hard, and one of her boys, away at boarding-school, was ailing. We spent most of the afternoon in the garden and I was pleased to see that as time went on Gramercy's peace and beauty were smoothing some of the strain and anxiety from her face. I had meant to give her tea on the lawn, but the fickleness of an English summer drove us indoors, and although the sun came out again later the grass was too wet for us to stay in the garden any longer. Instead, we sat in the library, and I curled up in Colonel Mayhew's chair and watched, through his small circular window, as he had loved to do, the shadow of the old oak lengthening slowly across the grass. The evening sun, coming levelly through the bay window, pitched a sharp dagger of light into the room and lifted into high relief an oblong patch of Eleanor's portrait—the shelf attached to the arms of her chair, with its odd miscellany of objects. I had noticed them before, but this time, lying idly back in the chair where Colonel Mayhew had always sat of an evening, I really considered them. A gold paper crown, such as a child might have painted and cut out to while away a rainy afternoon, with a daisy chain twisted through it, standing on a brown leather-bound book. A child's gold bangle in the shape of a serpent with brilliant emerald eyes. The cracked lid of one of those china honey-pots, in the shape of a beehive with an outsize bee for a handle, standing on another book—a black one this time, heavily tooled. And behind them, a little apart, but clearly visible as Stephen had painted it, a small silver clock with its hands pointing to a quarter-past four. They seemed an odd and rather pathetic assortment

of things for Eleanor to have gathered about her: treasures, I guessed, from her childhood that her failing brain had turned to for consolation.

Madge saw me looking at them and her eyes followed mine. "I don't know what Stephen's like as a doctor," she said, "but at least he can paint. I never can understand how Uncle Bernard could endure to have that portrait there. It's so exactly like poor Eleanor, and so . . . somehow . . . disturbing. I suppose as he asked particularly for it to be done he hasn't liked to put it away."

My mind was on the crown and the china bee, and the bracelet that must have been so much too small for a nineteen-year-old wrist—all of them lifted into temporary prominence by the fitful evening sunlight. I said, "She must have been very lonely, poor child."

"Yes," Madge agreed. "I'm afraid she must. After Debbie died. . . ." She lifted her eyes again to the portrait. "That bee thing," she said, "was part of a present she gave Debbie when she was a little mite. She discovered that the name Deborah means a bee in some language—Hebrew I believe. It was a great joke between them when Eleanor was small. She must have gone on treasuring all that was left of it because it had belonged to Debbie."

I thought of Anna's cold, chiselled beauty and Dr. Stephen of the thin lips. Poor Eleanor with her china bee for sole comfort and companionship! I wondered what was the history of the paper crown and the bracelet. And why the daisy chain? Probably the books were some that Debbie had read to her as a child, though they didn't look like a child's books. They looked peculiarly heavy, solid tomes: I began to wonder what they were. . . .

The library at Gramercy has built-in bookshelves

reaching from floor to ceiling on two of its walls. While Madge talked of Eleanor's childhood and the accident that had made her a cripple when she was eight years old, I let my eyes wander along the lines of books, seeking the two which were in the portrait. I found the black one after a few minutes' search, and got up to take it down from its shelf. Madge watched me, rather in surprise I think, as I opened it. It was a copy of the first five books of the Old Testament, printed in the seventeenth century, giving the text alternately in Hebrew and English; black letter, difficult to read: certainly not a book to attract a child.

"What's that?" Madge asked.

I read, with some difficulty, from the title page. " '*The Books of the Pentateuch in Hebrew*——' " and then I stopped. The name Deborah, Madge had just said, meant a bee in Hebrew, and Eleanor had balanced a china representation of a bee on a book that was printed partly in the Hebrew language. Standing there, with that ancient, well-worn volume in my hands, and Madge looking up at me with a faintly enquiring frown on her face, I got my first vague—very vague—clue to what had been in Eleanor's mind while she sat for her portrait.

It didn't come to me in a flash or anything like that. At first I only thought that she must have been consoling herself by associating a china bee with the Hebrew language to make Debbie seem nearer to her, or something of the sort. It wasn't until Madge's rather soft voice enquired, "What's the other book?" that I went on to the next stage.

The other book was more difficult to find. It had a heavy brown leather binding, with gold tooling round the edge; but so had many of Colonel Mayhew's books.

Moreover, it was on the very top shelf, near the door. It was Madge who finally located it, and I had to climb the little oak library staircase to reach it.

As I came down with it in my hands——

"Why, it's a Greek lexicon," Madge exclaimed in surprise. "What did Eleanor want with a lexicon?"

If a bee standing on a Hebrew testament meant Deborah—*if* it did!—what did a painted gold paper crown with a daisy chain wound through it mean in Greek? It sounded like some absurd and impossible riddle without sense or reason. But Eleanor's eyes were on me as I stood holding the lexicon, and the urgency in them was unmistakable and rather disturbing—almost as though Eleanor herself was imploring me not to give up so soon. . . .

Madge looked at me in silence when I put the query into words. Then she said quietly, "Well, let's see if we can find out."

But the lexicon was only Greek-into-English, and neither of us knew what we were looking for. After ten minutes we were completely fogged among strange symbols which had no meaning for us. It was while we were searching the shelves for some book that would give us the Greek for 'crown' that we stumbled upon the Dictionary of Names. It was an old book—Colonel Mayhew loved old books—clumsily bound and printed in old-fashioned, uneven type, and it claimed to give the meaning of every Christian name known to the English tongue.

Madge paused in front of it, one finger on its rough brown back. "That must be where Eleanor discovered that Deborah meant a bee."

"Fetch it down," I said. Following along the same line of thought, it seemed at least possible that the crown also represented a proper name.

Madge took the book from the shelf and opened it at 'A'. "She had a kitten called Angelina which she adored when she was small," she said. "We shall probably find that it's meant for Angelina. Or Bernard for her father."

But it wasn't. Angelina, said the dictionary, meant 'lovely' or 'angelic': by no stretch of imagination could it be made to mean a paper crown with a daisy chain twisted through it. And Bernard meant 'a hardy bear': I began to wonder if we had embarked on a wild goose chase. But Angelina was on the same page as Anna, and the thought of Stephen's wife set me turning over the pages to the 'S's.

The dictionary was perfectly definite and concise. '*Stephen. A crown or garland.*' And it added in careful explanatory afterthought the two letters. '*Gr*'.

Madge was staring down at it frowningly, one lip caught between her teeth. "Debbie . . . and Stephen. . . . That can't be a coincidence. Was it a game, do you suppose? And if so, who are the other things meant to represent—the bracelet and the clock?"

A cloud moved suddenly across the sun, and Eleanor's carefully arranged display fell back once more into shadowed obscurity. But Eleanor's face was still clear and distinct in the evening light, and whatever had been in Eleanor's mind while that portrait was being painted, I was very sure it was not a game. It was deadly serious.

I said so to Madge. "I believe she put those things beside her with some definite purpose. They mean something, and she wanted someone to know it. Someone," I said slowly, groping my way inch by slow inch towards the truth, "who was going to see that portrait. Her father of course: it was painted for him; he said so. They're a message for Colonel Mayhew. They must

be. That's why she's looking like that—wondering if he's going to understand. . . ."

Madge said quickly, "But, Judy, that's absurd. She . . . she went out of her mind at the end, you know. After Debbie died."

"She wasn't out of her mind when that portrait was painted," I said flatly. "She was just worried. Terribly, desperately worried. Look at her eyes. They're as sane as yours or mine. They're so sane that she's managed to put her whole soul into them, willing us to understand."

" 'Us?' "

"Her father then. The picture was painted for him." A sudden thought struck me. "Did she know it was to be hung there?"

Madge hesitated. "I don't know. Yes; probably she did; he'd always wanted a portrait of her there. They'd spoken of it several times."

"Then I believe she arranged those things deliberately in that position so that they would be lighted up when he sat in his usual chair of an evening—as they were tonight. Only he wasn't here: he never has been here on a summer evening to see them. There was something," I said again to Madge, groping . . . groping . . . groping after the truth, "that Eleanor desperately wanted him to know about Debbie and Stephen, and that was the only way she could find to tell him."

Outside it started suddenly to rain again—warm, gentle summer rain, splashing against the windows; soft; insistent. And in the twilit, shadowed room I suddenly saw clearly.

"*Because,*" I went on a little breathlessly, "*she knew she wouldn't be here to tell him herself.*"

Madge made a small, strangled sound, one slim hand to her throat. "Judy—stop! It's all the craziest guesswork! There isn't a word of truth in any of it! Eleanor

wasn't *ill*, you know, except in her mind right at the end. She couldn't have known beforehand that she was going to die. She . . . she fell from her bedroom window early one morning. . . ."

Stephen who looked cold and ruthless and devoid of affection or pity. Debbie who had died. A gold bracelet in the shape of a serpent. A little silver clock. . . .

"Or was she pushed?" I said.

I can still see Madge's face as she looked at that moment. Startled, shocked, incredulous—and yet with a dawning doubt and horror in her eyes, in case it could be true.

"Stephen . . ." she began; and changed the direction of her thoughts. "Anna . . ."

"They married," I reminded her, "soon after Eleanor died. You told me so yourself."

She shook her head. "We're talking nonsense, Judy. *Dangerous* nonsense. Why should Stephen murder Eleanor?" And then her eyes, racing ahead of her tongue, looked round the gracious room and out of the window to the garden's rain-washed evening sweetness, and there came to me an echo of Colonel Mayhew's voice on our first visit to Gramercy, "*It was to have belonged to my daughter.*"

"Where's Colonel Mayhew now?" I asked her.

She took a moment to answer as though her mind was still grappling with the thought I had flung at her.

"He's with Stephen and Anna in London. He . . . he isn't very well. I don't want to worry him."

"In that case," I said "we'd better try and read the rest of the message ourselves. What do you suppose the bracelet means?"

It seemed to me that Madge was dragging her mind back to the question from somewhere very far away. I

suppose it was the very urgency of my own conviction and will that forced her to apply her mind to the riddle: certainly she had no real belief herself then that I was talking sense.

"I remember her wearing it as a child," she said after a moment. "Andrew's mother gave it to her one birthday. It's a hideous thing to give a child."

I turned back to the Dictionary of Names. There were a wolf and a dog and a raven and a lion and a dove. There were a lamb and a gazelle and a weasel. But apparently no name known to the English tongue meant a snake. The nearest we could get was the Celtic 'Bridget' which meant 'shining bright'. That described the bracelet as Stephen had painted it; but Madge knew no Bridgets.

We were still poring over the dictionary when Bill came home.

He opened the library door and switched on the light. "What goes on? And why the dim, unreligious light?" He greeted Madge, asked after Andrew and the boys, and then turned to look, with some amusement, at our scattered array of books. "And why the sudden thirst for knowledge?"

"We're trying to find out what a snake could represent," I told him, my mind still on the search.

"Poison," said Bill promptly. "Any child knows that. '*Ye spotted snakes with double tongue*——' " And broke off at the look on our faces.

Stephen . . . Poison . . . Deborah . . . A crown and a snake and a bee. . . .

We argued about it for the rest of the evening. Bill said at once and definitely that it was all nonsense. I knew I was right. And Madge remained unconvinced —at least to begin with.

"This Deborah," said Bill, taking charge of the discussion. "When did she die?"

"In April of last year," Madge said.

"How? An illness?"

"She got a cold and it turned to pneumonia."

"Do you know what doctor attended her?"

"Stephen, I suppose. He's a qualified doctor, though he doesn't practise now. That's why Uncle Bernard left Eleanor in his care."

"And Anna?"

"Anna came a few months earlier, to be Eleanor's companion. Stephen found her."

"They married," I said stubbornly. "They're living with Colonel Mayhew in the home that was to be Eleanor's. They'll inherit his money and this house when he dies." It all added up to such obvious, incontrovertible sense. And suddenly I knew that it wasn't completed even yet—*because Colonel Mayhew wasn't well.* Madge had said so, only a few minutes before.

It was that, I think, that shocked her into final belief. Also, if we were right, it meant that we were not only trying to solve a murder but to prevent one. Time became suddenly all-important.

"You'll never convince Uncle Bernard," Madge said, "without concrete proof. He thinks the world of Stephen. Stephen's seen to that."

"Then we must produce the proof," I said, and I remember that even in those first few minutes I never had any doubt that we could do so. I looked up at Eleanor, leaning back in her chair with her tragic, gallant message arrayed like a banner beside her—the bee and the snake and the crown-garland—watching Stephen paint them, knowing that the artist in him would portray them faithfully; looking back on Deborah's death and forward to her own and, unable to

escape because of her infirmity, fighting her murderers with the precarious, uncertain weapon which was all she had—a cryptic message which it was long odds against anybody understanding. That and her own undefeated spirit, which also Stephen had portrayed, so that to anyone who looked at her picture with sympathy and discernment it was as though she cried out to them to bid them take heed:

"*Stephen . . . poisoned . . . Deborah.*"

How had she found out? The brain that planned that message and set it where it would be lifted into prominence each evening before her father's eyes, must have known that the message alone was of little use. If Madge realised that Colonel Mayhew would demand concrete proof, how much more clearly must Eleanor have known it.

"There's still the clock," I said. "That's your proof."

Madge frowned a little and Bill asked bluntly, "What do you mean?"

"I don't know," I said. "I don't know what it means or how it provides the proof we need; I only know it does. She was very wise, was Eleanor."

Bill looked at me for a moment in indecision. Then he turned to Madge.

"What do you know about the clock?"

She shook her head. "Nothing. Not a single thing. I don't remember even seeing it. I wonder if it's still in the house. If Judy's right . . ."

We began our search in the library itself, though I was certain it wasn't there. We worked through the house, room by room, opening cupboards and cabinets and searching in any place where a small object might have been put away. In the room that had been Eleanor's bedroom—a tranquil, sunny room with a wide bay window and a deep-cushioned window-seat

—we searched with special care, but still without result.

It was Madge who finally discovered it, stowed away in a cupboard in a tiny bedroom which we never used. We took it down to the library, put it on the mantelpiece beneath Eleanor's portrait, and set about trying to wrest its secret from it. It was an ordinary enough little clock, flat and square and silver, tarnished with neglect, and obviously broken. "Main spring gone by the feel of it," Bill decided after he'd shaken it and probed among its works. It still said quarter-past four, but had nothing further to tell us that we could understand. We went back to the room where we had found it and examined the cupboard where it had been stowed away. That also told us nothing.

"A clock," said Bill at last, "puts the emphasis on time. Four-fifteen in this case. Why four-fifteen? Tea-time, presumably. What else?"

None of us could answer that. Tea-time . . . a table set under the oak in summer; muffins round the fire in winter: a homely hour, far removed from poison and untimely death.

"Four-fifteen *a.*m.?" Madge suggested.

Sleepless nights . . . summer dawns breaking . . . But no apparent connection with Debbie or Stephen.

And so on—round and round, racking our brains and finding neither rhyme nor reason.

After a while Bill took an envelope from his pocket and wrote the figures on the back of it:

4 — 15

Madge and I watched him, and the figures stared derisively back at us, meaningless and bald.

"It could be a date," Bill said thoughtfully. "Does the fifteenth of April suggest anything to you?"

Madge hesitated. "Debbie died in April; I'm not sure of the date. But even if it *was* on the fifteenth, that isn't proof. A link, perhaps, with the other things, but not . . . not proof that we could use."

"How ill is Colonel Mayhew?" I asked.

She turned to me. "Not very seriously I think. He wrote that he had eaten something that had disagreed with him, but that Stephen was treating him and he hoped to be all right in a day or two."

Something that had disagreed with him! And Stephen was treating him—as no doubt he had treated Debbie. It had an ominous sound. I saw from the others' faces that the same grim thought was in all our minds.

"You must talk to him," I said to Madge. "Telephone him or go and see him right away. Make what excuse you like, and tell him as much or as little as you and Andrew think wise. But find out what he knows about that clock—or what he associates with the time four-fifteen. Ask him where the clock came from . . . what it reminds him of . . . whose it was. Get out of him every single thing he can think of to tell you about it—or about that particular time. Make him really *think* about it. After all, the message was to *him*; the key must be in *his* mind."

Madge left soon after, and Bill and I went up to bed, and I remember I couldn't sleep. I lay awake most of that night, thinking of Eleanor and Debbie and Stephen and Anna; thinking too of Madge and her Andrew who would be Colonel Mayhew's heir if anything should happen to Stephen. I liked the idea of Madge and Andrew and their boys coming to live at Gramercy with Colonel Mayhew: Madge's steady warm-heartedness, I thought, would comfort and uphold him, and in

the gracious old house and the loveliness of its surroundings Andrew might regain some of the health and strength that he had forfeited on Dunkirk beach.

I wondered when we should hear from Madge.

We hadn't long to wait. She came over the next morning, and Andrew came with her, because it was Saturday and he was at home. Andrew bore no resemblance either to his uncle or his cousin. He was a fair, quiet man, tall and broadly built, with alert blue eyes and a slow, rather shy smile. His empty left sleeve was tucked into his coat pocket; he looked, I thought, tired and rather ill, but his smile as he greeted me was as warm and friendly as ever.

Madge, I gathered, had telephoned Colonel Mayhew earlier that morning.

"He said he was feeling a little better," she told us, "and that Stephen was looking after him splendidly. I asked him about the clock, and he said at once, 'It's in Stephen's portrait of Eleanor.' That was all he could remember about it at first, except that it used to stand on the nursery mantelpiece when Eleanor was a child. He didn't know where it had come from in the first place; he didn't know what had become of it now. And the time four-fifteen hadn't any particular associations for him. I'm afraid," said Madge thoughtfully, "he began to think I was a bit mental when I went on nagging him about it. I told him it was important, though I didn't, of course, tell him why on the telephone, but we drew an absolute blank all round and I was just going to ring off when he suddenly remembered that the clock had been connected with an incident in Eleanor's childhood."

"Yes?" I said.

Madge hesitated. "It's a long time ago . . . and a very small thing, really. But it does concern that clock

and it's just possible . . . Anyway, here it is for what it's worth. When Eleanor was small Debbie used to punish her when she'd been naughty by making her stand in the corner of the nursery. One afternoon when she was about five years old she had an irresistible urge to decorate the landing walls with crayon drawings. I don't know where Debbie could have been, but she was evidently well out of the way, because Eleanor indulged her artistic talent to the full, and then, apparently feeling a bit dubious about the result, she decided to anticipate Debbie's probable reaction by getting right on with the punishment. She went and stood in the corner faithfully for a quarter of an hour, which was the average time decreed by Debbie for middling-bad naughtiness, and because it was always a point of honour that she shouldn't turn round while she was there, she put that clock on the window-sill where she could just see it out of the corner of her eye without turning her head."

"I don't see——" I began.

Madge held up a hand. "Wait a moment. That isn't quite all. When she'd stood there for her allotted fifteen minutes she went to put the clock back on the mantelpiece, but somehow she dropped it and it slipped down between the wall and the window-seat: the house is so old that the wall's crooked just there and in one place there's quite a gap between the wall and the seat. You don't notice it normally because the cushions hide it, but once Eleanor had dropped the clock no one could get it up without taking away part of the window-seat, and she was in disgrace all over again. That's the incident as Uncle Bernard told it to me on the telephone just now. It may mean nothing at all—it's nearly fifteen years since it happened—but it may—it just *may*—mean that Eleanor was trying to remind her father of a per-

fectly safe and unknown hiding place in the old nursery which later became her bedroom."

There was silence for a moment as Madge stopped speaking. Then Bill asked abruptly, "Well, what are we waiting for?" and turned towards the door.

I remember that on the way upstairs none of us found anything to say. Bill went up first, taking the stairs two at a time; then Madge and I; then Andrew. In the room that had been Eleanor's bedroom when she grew too old to need a nursery, Bill pulled the fitted cushions off the window-seat and threw them aside, revealing the plain wooden seat below. The wall, like the walls of so many sixteenth-century houses, bulged here and there, and in one place just underneath the window there was a gap, as Colonel Mayhew had said, of nearly two inches between the wall and the seat. We stood in a group looking at it, thinking of that small conscientious five-year-old putting herself in the corner for an exact quarter-hour by the clock . . . watching the hands' slow movement out of the corner of her eyes, without turning her head. . . .

"See if you can get your hand down, Judy," said Bill.

I tried, but although I could slide my fingers straight down beside the wall the hole was too narrow for me to turn my wrist, and Madge, when she tried, had no better success, though her hand was smaller than mine.

"There's something down there," she declared, withdrawing her hand. "I can just feel it, but I can't get hold of it."

"We need a saw," said Bill briefly, and went to fetch one.

There were marks, plain to see, where a piece of the wooden seat had been sawn away to retrieve the clock and later replaced. Now, nearly fifteen years later, Bill sawed it away anew while the rest of us stood and

watched him, wondering what we were going to find. It seemed an age until he lifted out an oblong slab of wood and reached down into the hole he had made: I remember wondering as I waited whether Eleanor knew what was happening, and hoping that she did.

It was a tin that Bill drew up—a plain, flat, narrow tin that might once have held sweets or biscuits. He stood with it in his hand, looking at it; then, holding it firmly, he eased off its lid.

A moment later we were all staring at a medicine bottle, half-full of a clear, pink liquid, packed into a nest of crumpled tissue paper.

A scrap of paper had been wrapped round it and tied on with a length of brown darning wool. Bill took the bottle from its nest—holding it carefully in a handkerchief, careful not to touch it with bare fingers—and severed the wool with his pocket knife.

"That's Eleanor's writing," said Andrew, as he unrolled the paper.

The message was necessarily brief, on account of the small space, but it was commendably clear.

"*Remains of medicine given to Deborah Parsons by Dr. Stephen Dale during her last illness. I believe it to be poisoned.*"

It was signed with her name—'*Eleanor Mayhew*'—and the date: *April 15th, 1953.*

For a long moment none of us spoke. Then Madge said slowly, "We can get it analysed. If it *is* poisoned . . . do you suppose it's enough proof?"

I looked at Eleanor's note. "It should be proof enough to convince her father," I said, "and that's

what matters most at the present moment."

Madge voiced the obviously weak link in our case. "He may think it was . . . because her wits were wandering."

"*Was* she mad?" Bill asked.

Madge hesitated; looked at Andrew.

"We've only got Stephen's word for it," Andrew said, "and in view of all this, Stephen's word may not be particularly trustworthy. It would have been very easy for him and Anna to keep her virtually a prisoner . . . intercept her letters to her father . . . spread abroad the report that her mind was affected. She couldn't move from her chair, and there was no one else here to help her."

"Old Mother Briggs," I suggested. "Only she's deaf. And pretty dumb as well."

Madge's eyebrows lifted a trifle. "Mother Briggs?"

"She used to 'come mornings to oblige the doctor'. Now she comes mornings to oblige us."

"She would have been someone for Eleanor to turn to for help, then."

"She's deaf," I said again. "Stone deaf. You have to simply yell at her to make her hear anything, and Anna and Stephen would have been around all the time. And she can't read."

Andrew's steady eyes were on my face. "So what it boils down to is that Eleanor was probably sane but helpless, and in the power of those devils." He turned to Bill. "If this stuff"—he pointed to the medicine—"*does* contain poison, would a jury convict on the strength of it?"

Bill laid the bottle and the note down on the table. "If it's got Dale's fingerprints on it," he said, "I don't see why not. I suppose there's not much doubt that he was responsible for Eleanor's death as well—he and his

wife between them. But I doubt if we could ever pin it on them. Was this the window she fell from?"

"Yes," said Madge.

"Wait a minute," said Andrew slowly.

We all looked at him.

"What was she doing at the window so early in the morning?" he asked. "Granted Stephen may have pushed her out—which is what we all suspect—why was she there to be pushed? She'd managed somehow to get from the bed to the window-seat, which couldn't have been an easy thing for her to do. *Why?* And why did Stephen change his tactics? He'd got away with posion once. He's evidently getting ready to try it again now. They say once a poisoner always a poisoner. Yet with Eleanor he took a far greater risk. I mean—this window isn't a very great height above the ground. Suppose the fall hadn't killed her? Suppose she'd lived . . . even a few minutes . . . to tell what had happened? It doesn't seem to me to make sense."

I moved across to the window and looked down to the flagged terrace below, seeing in imagination that still, tragic figure as Stephen must have seen it.

"What do you mean?" Madge asked Andrew.

"Only this: suppose her death *was* an accident after all—a lucky accident for Stephen, but an accident for all that. Suppose she was trying to get to her hiding place before anyone else was awake."

Madge's eyes went to the broken window-seat. "But she couldn't have taken the tin out. *I* couldn't reach it. Nor could Judy."

"No," Andrew agreed. "She couldn't have taken the tin out. But she might have been trying to put something else in."

Bill shook his head. "There's nothing else there. Look for yourself."

Andrew looked at Madge. "Who was it who found her? Do you remember?"

"I always imagined Stephen did, but I don't think I ever really heard."

"Old Mother Briggs might know," I suggested. "She's downstairs now. Shall I ask her?"

"Call her up here, Judy," Andrew said. "I'd like to ask her some questions."

"Ask them loudly then," I warned him. "She's as deaf as a post."

I ran downstairs, past the hall window that framed a tranquil picture of roses and still green branches and a serene June sky; past the open door of the library that gave me a brief glimpse of Eleanor watching with anxious eyes. . . .

The kitchen was hot and disorderly and noisy with the clatter of crockery. Pastry board and rolling pin and a scattered dusting of flour over everything argued pastry recently in the making, and in the midst of chaos —slapping the lid back on the flour bin; adding knife and cup and mixing bowl to the array of used crockery already in the sink—stood Mrs. Briggs, enveloped in a vast blue apron, arms bare to the elbow.

I had to yell at her before I could make her understand what I wanted, and then she came with marked reluctance, pausing to pull down her sleeves, and grumbling at the interruption because her pastry was 'in'. She stumped upstairs behind me, wiping floury hands on the vast apron, and stood in the doorway, foursquare and glum, oozing non-collaboration.

Andrew said pleasantly, "Good morning, Mrs. Briggs. I believe you were here when Miss Eleanor died."

She stared at him with the stony blankness of the very deaf. "Eh?"

He repeated it fortissimo.

A little shower of flour scattered from her apron to ıe floor as she folded her arms. "In a manner o' ɔeakin', Yes, and in a manner o' speakin', No."

"How do you mean?"

"Eh?"

"What exactly do you mean by that?"

Her expression suggested that though her Christian ıty was to suffer fools, she saw no reason to do so adly. "It was me as found 'er a-lyin' there w'en I ɔme in at eight o'clock, an' a 'orrible shock it was wot ain't got over yet nor never shall. Dead for nigh on o hours she'd been then, 'cording to wot the doctor ys, so if it's about the time she *died* as you're wantin' know I can't tell you nothin', not being there till two urs after, though punctual on the dot that morning I am *hevery* mornin' o' me life!" The glare she flung my direction dared me to challenge that assertion.

"But you did see her," Andrew persisted, "as she lay the terrace?"

"You're right it give me the terrors! There wasn't a ht for a week wot I didn't dream of it, and still "

Andrew tried again. "You—did—see—her—lying—

—there?" He pointed to the window.

"That's what I'm a-tellin' you," said Mrs. Briggs ly.

"Was she . . . was there anything in her hand?"

"Eh?"

"Was—she—holding—anything?"

"Only a bit of ivy off the 'ouse wot she must 'a ched at, falling, poor thing."

"And you didn't find anything down there on the ce that she might have dropped as she fell?"

"Like wot?"

"Anything. Something fairly small. A piece of pape for instance."

Mrs. Briggs shook a positive head. "Nought o' th kind. No paper there wasn't. Just a bit of ivy. A that I know for a fact."

We seemed to be reaching a dead end. I glanced Andrew, my lips already opened to dismiss the o woman. There was a faint frown on his face.

"Is there a gardener?" he asked.

I think he meant the question for Bill, but for so obscure reason Mrs. Briggs heard it and answered "Not now there ain't. But old Jim Chandler come reg'lar in the doctor's time until 'is screws got so bad couldn't work."

"How long ago did he leave?"

"Eh?"

Andrew repeated it.

She took a minute to think about that. "Way b in the winter. Just a few days before Christmas it m 'a bin, 'cos I remember the day 'e went 'e give m little tin world wot 'e'd just picked up on the rock out there." Her hand jerked towards the wind " 'There y'are, me ole dear,' 'e says ter me, 'I'm givin' you the world fer a Christmas box.' A rare for a joke was Jim."

Andrew queried, "A little tin world?"

She nodded. " 'S'right. With a 'ole in where puts pencils in to sharpen 'em. Only it won't worl more along of a great dent in it."

"And he found it on the terrace last Christmas? S Miss Eleanor's death?"

"Eh?"

Andrew skipped that one. "Where is it now?"

She looked vaguely round the room. "Don't l as I could rightly tell you, not now. I seem ter

puttin' it on the kitchen dresser when it wouldn't work, but it ain't there now."

"Go and look for it," I yelled. "I'll come with you."

She looked at me with sour disapproval. "Me pastry's in."

"Let it burn," I said recklessly, and I propelled her out of the room and down the stairs. I heard the others following close behind.

Into the muddled kitchen we plunged—all four of us, and Mrs. Briggs whose mind, as well as her oven, was filled with pastry. No old-time explorer ever put into his search for a new world one quarter of the urgency with which we hunted for that dented tin globe. It wasn't on the dresser, nor in any of the dresser cupboards. It wasn't in the table drawer. It wasn't anywhere. We turned the kitchen inside out, to Mrs. Briggs's exasperation and perplexity, but without result. We got hotter and hotter and Mrs. Briggs got crosser and crosser, and when Bill knocked over the cracked pottery vase in which she kept her spills I started to curse him for a clumsy lout, and was brought to a halt by the sudden, imperative pressure of Madge's hand on my arm. Broken pottery scattered over the tiled floor, spills flew everywhere, but among them rolled unevenly a small tin pencil sharpener made like a globe, and dented all out of shape.

Mrs. Briggs turned from the sink at the sound of the crash.

"I'll be pleased," she told me with feeling, "if you'll see fit to take a week's notice as from today. I'm not used to 'avin' me kitchen messed up with a lot o' parlour tricks and I don't take kindly to it at my time o' life." She stooped cumbrously for the pencil sharpener and put it into Bill's hand. "If this is wot you're after, there it is, and plenty like it ter be bought

at Woolworths without breakin' up a body's 'ouse an' 'ome, an' I'll thank you to take it away now you've got it."

We took it away. We took it into the library and we set it on the table there for Eleanor to see.

"It opens," Andrew said. "You'll have to force it." And he and Madge and I watched while Bill inserted the point of his pocket-knife beneath the misshapen tin and prized the two halves of it apart.

Inside was a tiny twist of paper. Bill straightened it out and read its message aloud; like the other, it was very brief.

> "*Today they have begun poisoning my food. Eleanor Mayhew. June 8th, 1953.*"

Madge was looking over his shoulder. "June the eighth. She died on the morning of the ninth."

There was silence for a moment. Then——

"So that," said Andrew softly, "was what Eleanor hastened her death to tell us. '*Today they have begun poisoning my food.*' " With his one hand he took the twist of paper from Bill and picked up the two battered halves of globe. "I'll need the other note and the medicine bottle as well," he said. "Get the car running, Madge, while I collect them; I've just about got time to catch the two o'clock train to London. There's a bloke I used to know in the Army," said Andrew grimly, "who's some sort of big noise at Scotland Yard. He asked me to look him up one day, and I've got a feeling the time's come to accept his invitation. . . ."

The Thimble River Mystery

JOSEPHINE BELL

THE Thimble River, running out into Southampton Water, is, like most of the small rivers and creeks of that inlet, as of the Solent, much frequented by yachtsmen. Though it winds for more than five miles inshore and is fed at its upper end by a small stream, which earns it the superior title, it is tidal throughout its length, with a considerable rise and fall, that leaves on the ebb a wide stretch of mud at each bank, where much unlovely junk reveals itself, and the seagulls spatter up to their ankles, looking for titbits in the black ooze. At either side of the deep channel there is a continuous line of fixed moorings, bobbing unused and lonely during the short bitter days and black nights of winter, when all but the biggest yachts are laid up on shore; but in the summer serving to keep their charges in a lovely unbroken line of many-coloured hulls, and tall masts, and graceful cobwebs of rigging. On the shores are the various yards, boat-builders' sheds for construction and maintenance and repairs, and slips for launching or hauling out, and jetties and landing-stages running down to the water. Round these the yachts' pram dinghies cluster all through the season, in a constant traffic to and from the boats moored out in the river.

Most of the boats, whose owners are at work elsewhere during the week, go out only at the week-ends, and for an annual cruise, coast-wise or across the Channel. But some, whose owners have no other home

or occupation, or who prefer and can afford to spend the summer afloat, make their yachts their home, coming ashore regularly for their milk and newspapers and stores, perhaps going off for a day's sail, or even moving to another port for a week or two, but on the whole staying where they are, comfortably isolated, wholly master of their world.

Of these Mr. Harcourt was the best known and the most notable throughout the length of the Thimble River. He had lived in his yacht, *Helena II*, winter and summer since the end of the Second World War, when the boat-houses, cautiously, because of the necessary restrictions on wood and paint and labour, had begun to put the pleasure boats back on the water. It was said that his son had been killed in the war, and his wife had died at the end of it. His boat, not new, had been laid up for years. She leaked like a sieve when they first put her in the water to test her. But re-caulked and re-fitted, scraped down and painted, she might have been her old self when she was finally out on her moorings, though her lines looked a bit old-fashioned now beside the newer designs all round her.

Tom Winter, who ran the boat yard and owned the moorings in front of it, was proud of his work of restoration, and pleased to see *Helena II* so smart and like her old self. He often said it gave him a queer feeling not to see the three Harcourts on deck together as in the old days, casting off for a trip to France, or tying up after a week-end down at Yarmouth, Isle of Wight, or busy just fixing the gear, or polishing the bright work.

For Mr. Harcourt was very particular about the way his boat was kept. *Helena II* might be old, built in the early twenties, before the bermudan rig became almost universal. But she still looked smarter than

many of the other yachts at Winter's yard, whose owners came down in a hurry on Friday night and sailed hard till Sunday evening, and scrambled ashore in the dusk, to get back to their homes in time to start work again on Monday. Mr. Harcourt had always insisted on absolute order above and below. Order and polish and spotless decks and shining paintwork. Now that he was alone the work took up most of his time. When his friends arrived to crew for him, at those times when he wanted to sail, they were filled with admiration and astonishment. To Mr. Harcourt their remarks seemed unnecessary and rather foolish.

One evening, when the old man, rag and can in one hand, for he had just finished oiling a sheet winch, leaned against the combing of his cockpit, idly trying the winch with the other hand, he heard the sound of oars, and looked up to see John Chudley, in his dinghy, pulling past him. Chudley owned the next boat downstream from *Helena II*, and, as he lived in the neighbourhood, was able to get the little jobs on board done in the evening, after he got back from his office in Southampton.

Mr. Harcourt did not always feel sociable, but today he decided that he would like to have a chat with young John. He had thought of a way his neighbour might solve one of his problems without too much expense, and by doing his own work. So he put away his oil-can and rag and, going forward along his decks, gave the young man a hail.

John Chudley had nearly reached his own boat by then, and did not feel like going back.

"Care to come aboard for a drink?" Mr. Harcourt shouted.

Chudley stopped rowing, smiling and wondering whether to accept.

"I've got an idea for fixing your spinnaker halliard," went on the old man. "But don't come if you're pressed for time."

That decided John. Invitations from Harcourt were rare. The old boy led a lonely existence; perhaps he felt it more often than any of them imagined.

"Thanks awfully," he said. "I'll just dump this stuff, and come over."

A few minutes later he arrived alongside *Helena II*, breathing hard from his stiff, though short, pull against the tide. He found two fenders in place to prevent his pram dinghy scraping the spotless white paint of the yacht's topside, and smiled to himself as Harcourt took the dinghy's painter and made it fast so that the dinghy was carried out behind by the swift current.

"Will you come below, or have it up here?" asked Harcourt.

Chudley had been indoors at his work all day, so they sat in the cockpit and sipped their drinks, while the evening sunshine lay horizontal across the river, turning the white hulls to gold, and the gathering force of the ebb gurgled and slapped its way past, swinging *Helena II* from side to side on her mooring chain. The air was still: not a breath of wind stirred on the glassy water near the shore. Mr. Harcourt's burgee hung limp against the mast.

The old man delivered his advice about the halliard, but after that they said very little. Conversation is for the cabin. Sitting in the cockpit with the river and the shipping all about them there was no need of it.

John Chudley finished his drink and as soon as he thought it civil to do so, excused himself on the grounds that he had a lot to do on board his boat and very little time to do it in.

"There'll be trouble at home if I'm not back in good

time for supper," he said. "And anyway I've only got another hour of the tide."

Mr. Harcourt did not delay him, but drew his dinghy alongside for him, and held it while John climbed in and took up an oar.

"Give me a shove, and the tide'll do the rest," John said, fitting the oar into the slot in the stern of his dinghy.

Mr. Harcourt laughed, and walked up to the bows of *Helena II* to watch his guest moving swiftly across the short gap between their two boats. When Chudley was aboard his own craft he waved to him, called "good evening", and picking up the glasses out of the cockpit, went below.

Just after seven John Chudley got back into his pram and rowed away to the landing-stage. He was rather glad that Mr. Harcourt was below, because he was in a hurry. He had wasted precious time on that drink on *Helena II.* He hoped the old man was not going to make a habit of hospitality.

He need not have worried, because by the next morning Mr. Harcourt was dead.

Bob Goacher was an apprentice in Winter's shipyard. He was a keen, quick-witted lad, with a natural aptitude for working in wood. He already had an eye for it, both inherited and learned from his father, who was a joiner and carpenter. Bob had always intended to follow his father's trade, but living near the river had brought him into contact with boats from the start. He had gone bathing early, had learned to swim, and later to swim out and round the yachts. He had always admired their lines and their smooth shining enamel paint. Later he had acquired an old derelict dinghy for a few shillings, and mended her himself with his

father's help, and fitted her with a sail made from a discarded piece of canvas, and took her out proudly, learning to use the wind to drive her along, instead of pulling his arms off with the two sweeps. After Tom Winter took him on, his ambition grew. One day he would have a boat of his own, a real boat. He was never tired of telling his friends and the men at the yard how he would build her, and where he would take her, and how much he despised and envied men like Mr. Harcourt who could afford to keep a beautiful boat like *Helena II*, but hardly ever moved off the mooring.

On the morning after John Chudley had drunk with Mr. Harcourt, Bob Goacher arrived at Winter's as usual at half-past seven, and as usual, when he had hung up his coat and put on his working dungarees, he opened the big doors at the river end of the shed and looked out across the water. He saw at once a thing that startled him, and waited with impatience for his employer to arrive.

Tom Winter came into the shed at eight to see that the tools were ready for the start of the day's work.

"Mr. Winter," said Bob, coming forward. "When I got here I saw Mr. Harcourt's burgee was still up."

"Still——?" Winter looked at his watch, saw that it was barely eight, then walked down to the end of the shed and looked out. Across the water, at the masthead of *Helena II*, the small flag with its gay colours flapped in the morning breeze.

"That's funny," he said.

"He's so particular," put in Bob.

"You're right there. Looks as if it may have been up all night."

"He can't have gone away, forgetting to take it down. He must be there. His dinghy is alongside."

Tom Winter's face hardened.

"Hope the old boy's not been taken ill or anything. I think I'll go off and see."

With one of the older men from the yard he went off in one of the yard's old grey dinghies.

And they found Mr. Harcourt, fully dressed, lying on his cabin floor, with his head beaten in.

They went ashore, hardly speaking a word, and Winter left the other man on the landing-stage to watch anyone coming or going, while he himself went to his office to telephone to the police. In a short time Detective-Inspector Wright, with a police surgeon and two other assistants, arrived. Winter took them out to *Helena II.*

"Before you go aboard," the latter said, "I'd like to point out to you that mark on her topside. There, with the smear of green paint along it. Mr. Harcourt was very particular about his paint. There'd have been hell to pay if anyone bumped his boat. He'd be equal to going for anyone who did it."

"You mean there could have been an unpremeditated fight?"

"Yes."

"I'll bear that in mind," Inspector Wright said, and climbed on board the yacht.

Later, when the party landed again at the stage, the man who had been left on guard stepped forward and whispered to Tom Winter.

"If you've anything to say, say it to me," said Inspector Wright, severely.

The man reddened, but he spoke up at once.

"It's just that I saw you looking at that scrape on the topside," he said. "I noticed it myself, same as Mr. Winter. And I've been having a look round these prams." He pointed to the little ships' dinghies,

clustered about the stage. "There's one of them got a white mark on her. It shows because she's painted green."

"Green!" exclaimed the Inspector, going over to look.

"That's Mr. Chudley's," said Winter, slowly.

"Oh, dear," said Jill Wintringham at breakfast in her pretty dining-room in Hampstead. "John Chudley seems to be involved in that affair at Thimble, after all."

Her husband handed her a letter he had just read, and took the newspaper she gave in exchange.

David read the paragraph she had seen. It was an account of the inquest on an elderly eccentric named Harcourt, who for the last nine years had been living on board a yacht in the River Thimble, ten miles from Southampton.

His body had been found two days before in the cabin of his boat. A sum of money had disappeared.

The account went on to say that death was caused by a fracture of the skull inflicted by an undiscovered weapon. Verdict—murder by some person or persons unknown.

"Thank God the coroner's jury has been reasonably cautious," said David, when he had finished the paragraph.

Jill nodded.

"Poor John," she said. "What a thing to be mixed up in. Shall you go down?"

"Oh, yes. The sooner this is cleared up the better."

"You don't think the local police will be competent?"

"I resent the sting concealed in that remark. I have a perfectly open mind about the local police, but John wants me to go down, and he's in a spot, and——"

"Of course you must go, darling," said Jill, soothingly. "I'm not trying to stop you. And I think it's a very good thing we've been crewing for the Foresters so often the last two years, and know a little bit about boats now."

John Chudley met David at Southampton with a car, and drove him to his house above the Thimble.

"How did you get mixed up in this at all?" David asked him.

Chudley answered, "My boat happens to be moored next to his. I went aboard him that evening for a drink, round about six, but I didn't stay long. Actually I was going off to my own boat when he called me on board. As I had things to do I got off to my own boat after a brief chat, and stayed there till just after seven. I couldn't stay longer than that on account of the tide."

"Why?"

"The landing-stage at Winter's is on the mud at low water: you can't approach it from the river without wading ankle-deep in mud."

"That must be very inconvenient sometimes."

"It is. Perhaps one day Winter will add a piece to his stage."

"So anyone coming down after you left would not have been able to take a boat away from there?"

"No. Not until there was more water as the tide came in."

"A couple of hours later?"

"At least that."

"About this burgee. Mr. Harcourt was one of these types who observe the strict drill, I suppose? Flags down at sundown, whatever time that is, and up at 08 hours precisely?"

"Yes."

"So that the burgee being left up suggests he was killed before sundown. About nine that evening."

"Then it must have been after seven-fifteen. I was near enough in my boat to have heard anyone going aboard his."

"And you would have seen a visiting dinghy alongside him as you left to go ashore."

"Of course."

"And according to you no one could have gone off after you before the tide made the landing-stage unusable, at least for a few hours. But you got in, didn't you? Couldn't someone have gone down directly after you left and still got off?"

"I doubt it. I had to punt myself over the mud the last few feet, and it dries out very quickly after it reaches that point. The sheds were all locked up, so there wasn't anywhere for anyone to hide. I met no one in the lane coming down from the main road."

"So you were the last person to see him except the murderer. I suppose that has made the complications for you."

John Chudley nodded.

"There is a scrape on the old boy's topside with green paint in it. My dinghy is the only green-painted one at the yard. And that's another thing. Harcourt wasn't expecting his visitor, or he would have been up on deck hanging out fenders to prevent just such a scrape."

Next morning David made his way to the boat-yard early, and after explaining to Winter who he was, persuaded him to take him off to the yacht.

Helena II, he found, was an old-fashioned, gaff-rigged cutter. He noticed that all her many halliards and other ropes were tied out to the shrouds to prevent them banging against the mast: a sensible precaution

to take for one who lived on board, and wished to avoid the annoyance of tapping and rustling noises transmitted down the mast into the cabin.

David's eyes followed the thin hoist of the burgee from a cleat to which it was fastened at the foot of the mast up to the little flag, still flapping above the masthead. Evidently no one had thought of taking it down since Harcourt's death.

Turning away, David went carefully over the decks, find nothing of interest until he came to the shrouds on the starboard side. There he checked, stopped, and gathered from the wire, near its foot, a few thin strands, the frayings of a fine rope.

After this he got back into the dinghy, where Winter had been sitting all this time watching him.

David looked him in the eyes.

"Do you think Mr. Chudley did it?" he asked.

There was no answer.

"You don't want to suspect him, but you can't be sure he didn't. Any motive, that you know of?"

Tom Winter made up his mind to talk. His words came with a rush.

"I'd have said it was impossible, only Mr. Chudley is so dead set on sailing. He needed a lot of repairs this year, and I put them in hand for him. But I'm a small concern and I have to be paid for my material as I go along. Mr. Chudley couldn't manage the figure I gave him, so the work had to be suspended *pro tem.*"

"I'm here as Mr. Chudley's friend," said David. "As I told you. I've not even made contact with the police yet. You may not want to tell me anything if you have your doubts of Chudley, but it would help a lot if you would say what you know about this money that is supposed to have been the incentive."

"I don't see any harm in that," answered Winter.

"Mr. Harcourt was very regular in his habits. He didn't come ashore more often than he could help, and he only went into Southampton once a month for stores and that. I think he always got his money on these trips, because he'd come into my office and pay his bill for the moorings, and any odd jobs we'd done for him. Regular as clockwork. And he always had a tidy bit of money with him those days."

"The day of his death was one of those days?"

"Yes. And I noticed he had a lot of money in his wallet, more even than he usually did. There were a lot of five-pound notes, besides the usual thick wad of pound notes. I wasn't really surprised because he was planning to go off down west to the Helford River for a month, starting at the next week-end, when he had a crew joining."

"I see. Have you any idea which bank he used?"

"Oh, yes. It was on his cheques. We'll get back on shore, and I'll give you the address."

With this written down on a slip of paper David was leaving the office when he paused and looked back.

"I suppose no one else saw that money?" he asked.

Winter's face showed his annoyance. David repeated his question, adding, "The police will be sure to ask. It might help to get things clear first."

Tom Winter nodded.

"They did ask," he said. "I told them what I'm telling you. Young Bob Goacher, one of my apprentices, came in just as Mr. Harcourt peeled off one of the single notes to give me. He must have seen, too. Couldn't have helped it."

"Do you mind if I have a word with him?"

"I'll take you down to the shed. Whether he'll speak up or not is his affair."

Goacher was in the boat-builder's shed, at work on a new fourteen-foot sailing dinghy. David went up to him and began, first of all, to admire his work.

"She'll be a nice job," agreed the young man, shortly. He seemed disinclined to talk. But as David continued his praise he dropped his reserve and became enthusiastic in his turn.

Very soon he was describing the sort of boat he meant to have for himself, and this seemed likely to continue indefinitely when he suddenly broke off with a muttered "Castles in the air."

"Oh, I shouldn't say that," said David easily. "You might win your football pools, or get left a legacy."

Bob swung round on him.

"What do you know?" he asked quickly.

"What about?"

"People are saying I did the poor old beggar in to get his money. I did a lot of odd jobs for him one way and another. He used to say as a bit of a joke, 'I'll remember you in my will, Bob.' I never took it seriously. Now they're saying I did."

"Do they say when you are supposed to have done it? Mr. Chudley tells me the yard people went home at six and there was no one here when he tied up at seven-fifteen."

"That's right. But I came back. Mr. Harcourt wanted his accumulator. It was being charged and it wasn't ready earlier. I fetched it here from the shop, and took it out to him at half-past seven. Just handed it to him and left."

"How did you get out over the mud, and back?"

The lad grinned.

"It wasn't quite dried out. But I had to get ashore climbing from one to another of the rest of the dinghies. I doubt anyone could have done it after me."

"Until well after sundown?"
"That's right."

David next visited the bank where Mr. Harcourt had kept his account. After a few words of explanation to the manager he was allowed to see Denton, the cashier who had served Mr. Harcourt on the day he was killed.

"Denton is not allowed to tell you anything about Mr. Harcourt's account," said the manager, as he moved towards the door of his room in order to leave the two men together. "In fact he will have very little to tell you, I'm afraid. The police told us to say as little as possible to the Press."

"I'm not the Press," said David, "as I told you before. I'm a friend of John Chudley's."

"We'd like to oblige Mr. Chudley," said the manager, in a guarded manner, "since he's a customer of ours, too."

When he had gone David turned to the cashier.

"How many of you are there working here?"

"Just the manager and one other clerk and myself. You see, we're only a small branch for the convenience of people further out. The main branch is in the City centre."

"I see. Now tell me about Mr. Harcourt's visit."

Denton drew a deep breath.

"The old gentleman came in according to his usual habit at one o'clock precisely. I was on duty. I generally take the one to two break while the manager is out to his lunch. I go off twelve to one. The other chap and the young lady also go from one to two. We do practically no business during that hour."

"Are you quite alone in the bank at that time?"

"The porter is back. He's handy if wanted."

"So Mr. Harcourt cashed his cheque at that time. Was he the only customer in the bank?"

"Except for Mr. Chudley. He was there, too, and spoke to Mr. Harcourt. He was in very good form; we had our usual little chat about sailing."

"Ah!" said David. "You are one of the breed, are you?"

"I'm very keen. I have a twelve-foot dinghy of my own."

"Where do you keep her?"

"At Thimble. That's about two miles down-stream from where Mr. Harcourt's yacht is."

"I'd like to see your boat," said David.

They agreed to meet at Thimble village pub near the river-side at six that evening.

Denton's boat was on a mooring amongst a fleet of other small craft. David was surprised to see that her mainsail was bent on and neatly rolled under a sail-cover.

Denton borrowed a pram and rowed David off.

"I haven't got one of my own," he explained.

"But you prefer a mooring?" asked David politely.

Most small craft, like this twelve-footer, were pulled up on the hard after use, and the sails and halliards taken away and stowed in the boat-house. It was better for the sails, and prevented weed growing on the boat's bottom.

"Yes," Denton answered the question. "I think so. I can go out without wasting time. Less risk to the paint, too. Besides, I'm hoping to have an all aluminium boat before long, larger than this, of course. I secured a mooring when one was available. They are not so easy to come by."

The two men climbed into the sailing dinghy. She was a smart little craft, painted bright red, with chromium fittings and an aluminium mast.

"I'd like to take you for a sail, and show you what she can do," Denton said. "But the tide's still running

down for three hours or more, and there doesn't seem to be much wind, and what there is will probably drop in the next hour or so. With no wind and no motor we couldn't make up against the tide."

"Pity," said David. "Another time, perhaps."

He touched the neatly stowed halliards, all grouped round the aluminium mast.

"I've enjoyed seeing her," he said politely.

Denton put him on shore, whence he made his way back to Chudley's house. After dinner he got his friend to take him to the police station.

"You're in the clear, old boy—I think," he explained, as they drove along. "But the moment has come to declare myself to the official mind, and persuade them how right I am."

"But it's less than twenty-four hours since you arrived," said John, doubtfully.

"You've no idea how co-operative everyone has been," David answered.

At the police station David saw Inspector Wright and explained his position in the case, and also who he was, and why Chudley had asked for his help.

"We know all that," said Inspector Wright. "You've been noticed here and there today, and we took the trouble to check up with Winter for the name, which rang a bell, so we were able to get the rest. You have a reputation for poking your nose into this sort of thing, Dr. Wintringham."

David laughed. The Inspector's voice was genial; opposition might not be severe.

"Was that why the bank manager was so cagey?"

It was the Inspector's turn to laugh.

"I'll let you into the detail of the money. Harcourt

cashed a cheque for sixty pounds that morning. He spent ten pounds on stores and small bills, Winter's among them. The other fifty has gone."

"Apart from the bank the only people who knew he had all that money were the people he paid in cash, including Winter, and the ones who saw it, Chudley at the bank, and Goacher at the yard."

"That's right."

"About Harcourt. He was fully dressed, wasn't he? That and the evidence of the burgee puts the time early in the evening."

"His clothes wouldn't. The only irregular thing in his habits was his bed-time. Oh, and his meals. People have seen the light on in his cabin well into the small hours. Not that anyone seems to have noticed it that night. He was getting a bit eccentric the last few years. Not surprising, with his history."

"So he could have been attacked during the night, when the tide was up again. Provided someone remembered to hoist his burgee again, too. The weapon went overboard, presumably."

"Not in the vicinity. At least, we've not found it. But it might be anywhere in the river."

"And the motive was unquestionably money?" said David.

"We haven't come across any other," said Inspector Wright.

"My friend John, and the boy, Bob Goacher, both have that motive. Winter complained of being short on capital, too. All of those could do with more money. But so, perhaps, could Denton, the bank cashier."

"Could he?"

"I'm not sure. It's very possible. I can't prove it, but you could."

"I don't know," said Wright, eyeing David closely.

"He lives very quietly, he's a bachelor, he pays all his bills, his only hobby is sailing."

"He wants a two-and-a-half-ton all aluminium yacht," said David.

The other smiled.

"They all want more than they can afford in the way of boats. It isn't often serious."

"In the case of these four it was serious enough to drive one of them to murder," said David.

There was silence for a time, then the Inspector said, "You've worked out the points about the ebb, I see."

"I have. But according to my theory they don't matter."

"No. But have you anything to support it?"

"The evidence is rather slender," said David. "Literally slender."

He produced a few frayed wisps of rope from his wallet.

"These came off Mr. Harcourt's boat. Identify them, and I think they will lead you to agree with me."

He described his visit to the yacht that morning.

"I see what you mean," said Inspector Wright. "But I'm dashed if I can see how we can make anything out of it."

"I'll tell you," said David.

The next morning Chudley, Goacher, Winter and Denton were taken out separately to *Helena II*, in turn, and then, after being brought back to land, to the police station.

David followed them there, and on arriving found Chudley, Goacher and Winter sitting together in the charge-room.

"Where is Denton?" he asked.

"In the superintendent's office. He said would you please go in, sir. This way, sir."

Denton, white-faced and cringing, swung round as he entered. David looked at him.

"You didn't take enough trouble, Denton," he said. "It was quite a neat idea to put up the burgee again after you killed Harcourt. It muddled the time. It made it seem impossible for anyone from your part of the river to come up by water and do it before sundown. There was no wind that evening, we know. You were lucky with the medical evidence, too. It is not always easy to put the time of death within a few hours, and Harcourt must have had his last meal particularly late that evening, which was a bit of luck for you at the post-mortem. You were helped by the fact that Mr. Chudley and Goacher both visited the yacht between six and eight, when you were known to have been playing around in your own dinghy down at Thimble. Also boat is red, and by using Mr. Chudley's green hy to bump the yacht's side you again suggested effort. Going off, from Winter's yard, as you did, e time early that night, you had enough water to the landing-stage and keep the mud off your es. You saw his cabin light on, and knew he was so you had your weapon handy and your plan of n prepared. You scrambled on board *Helena* kly, not caring if you bumped her or not, or was devilishly deliberate? You must have flung a loop he dinghy painter round the nearest stanchion to e fast, jumped up over the rail, and struck down Harcourt as he began to come up on deck to see t was happening. You took the money and put out cabin lights. You flung the weapon in the river—id y 1 row farther off, afterwards, to sink it where uldn't be picked up? But you ought to have known

Mr. Harcourt better. You ought to have got to know his yacht better before you tampered with her. Because several people knew him and his ways and his boat very well indeed."

"You're mad," Denton spluttered. "I don't know what you mean."

"Read him what the other three said," David suggested.

The Superintendent took up three pieces of paper which Inspector Wright pushed along the desk to him.

"Chudley, Winter and Goacher all state the same things," the Superintendent began. "They were asked separately this morning, as you were, to put down anything unusual you saw on the yacht *Helena*. You put down one word: Nothing. They all pointed out that the burgee hoist is at present fastened to a cleat at the foot of the mast, whereas Mr. Harcourt invariably fastened it to the shrouds on the starboard side. He had a thing about halliards flapping. He tied all his strings out away from the mast."

"That was what I noticed," said David. "And moreover, I found some frayed bits of rope on the shrouds. They tally with the hoist, don't they, Superintendent?"

"That's so."

"Just because you make fast your own burgee halliard to a cleat on your mast is no reason you should do so on another boat. Every man has his own way of fixing things. You ought to have remembered that and gone to look first. After all, you knew it would be dark when you planned to go off to kill an unsuspecting, defenceless old man, in order to steal his money. The money you had counted out to him yourself that very morning."

"I didn't," said Denton, breathlessly. "That's no

proof. I didn't notice that burgee halliard, I didn't notice anything wrong, but why should I? I've never been on that boat in my life."

"Someone put the burgee up again. The man with a motive for murder. You, Denton."

"Why me? I only saw him once a month. What did I know of his affairs? What should I do it for, anyway? I had no motive."

"I'm afraid you had," said David.

He looked at the Superintendent, who nodded to him to go on.

"Your own story of your times of work at the bank showed me that for an hour every day you had the bank to yourself. You *could* have indulged in a spot of embezzling if you had wanted to."

"And you did," said Inspector Wright, leaning forward. "Your manager had already found the leak, and he was expecting you to do something about it, though he naturally never thought of murder. He came to us a couple of days after the murder, because he found that some of the trouble had been put right. That gave us ideas, but there didn't seem to be anything to go on until Dr. Wintringham came along with his theory about the burgee."

"I didn't pin it on Denton until he showed me his own boat," said David, determined to be honest. "Seeing his own halliards stowed round the mast, and knowing from the wisps of rope that Harcourt had been in the habit of tying out his burgee halliard like his other ropes, it was obvious."

"You devil!" the cashier gasped. "You treacherous devil!"

"That's enough of that," said the Superintendent.

Denton was charged with the murder and removed.

The Superintendent said, "You'd never think a sailing man would do such a thing."

"He sailed for show," said David. "Haven't you seen his boat? Vulgar little piece, she is. Not the design, of course. The way he had her. Good varnished wood wasn't flashy enough for him; he had to have red paint. And he kept her in the river, away from the other dinghies; fully rigged, too, as if she was a cruising yacht, not a twelve-foot sailing dinghy at all. Also he told me he wanted a bigger craft, all alloy. Metal boats are pretty expensive."

The Superintendent said, "I congratulate you, Dr. Wintringham. They all have pretty good alibis for that night, and now we know which we have to break. Save us a lot of time. Your observation lets the other three out, too, at the same time it puts Denton in."

David smiled, then turning to Inspector Wright, said, "Does that lad, Bob Goacher, really get a legacy from the old man?"

"I believe he does," answered the Inspector.

"I'm glad of that," said David. "He'll build his dream boat with it."

"And most likely take her out to sea [redacted] himself."

They all laughed.

A Death in the Black-Out

MARY FITT

Characters

DR. FITZBROWN, a country practitioner
NURSE CALLUM, his receptionist and assistant
COLONEL DALL
MRS. DALL
DICK SCOTT-WALLIKER
TOPSY SCOTT-WALLIKER, his wife
WILCOX, a farm labourer
NURSE APPLEBY, a District Nurse
MRS. BARNES
DR. JONES, police surgeon
POLICE-SERGEANT COLLIS
SUPERINTENDENT MALLETT
JENKINS, an Army lorry-driver

DR. FITZBROWN (*narrating*): Yes, it's odd how many people think life in the country is slow. A country practice, for instance: why don't I move into the town, they say, where things really happen? I can assure you, *I* haven't found a country practice dull. On the contrary, I could tell you a dozen stories—strange stories—stories of passion and violence—even murder. For instance, I'm thinking of a night at the end of the last war—in November, 1944, to be precise. The war doesn't matter to it except that we were still suffering the black-out and those accursed masks on

our headlights. On a foggy night—and we get a great deal of fog in my part of the world—y could see only a few yards ahead of you in o unlit country lanes.

On the night I'm thinking of, it was drizzling. I had just come in at about half-past eight and w sitting down to a delayed meal when the telepho bell rang again . . .

(*Telephone bell in distance. Door opens. Enter* NURS CALLUM.)

(*Irritably.*) Well, Nurse, who is it? Mrs. Juke She can wait till I've had my dinner. She won't be through till the small hours.

NURSE CALLUM: No, Doctor, it's an accident: a mar on a motor-cycle, crashed in Bogwell Lane. Sev hæmorrhage. Sounds like a fractured skull.

FITZBROWN: Who rang?

NURSE CALLUM: The District Nurse—Nurse Appleby.

FITZBROWN: Where from?

NURSE CALLUM: From the Scott-Wallikers'. They've taken him into their cottage.

FITZBROWN: Who are *they*?

NURSE CALLUM: Oh, you must have seen them around —her, at any rate: plump young woman in slacks with a red scarf round her head. H injury: been in a mental home, th here a couple of months ago fo Huh! (*Contemptuously.*) They sp time with Colonel Dall and that he lives with, down at the Coun and playing bridge. Fine rest cu

FITZBROWN: Who's the injured man?

NURSE CALLUM: Oh, him! Joe Ba works at the garage in the vill singer. She has a lovely voice.

for the concert in aid of the Nursing Association. Much too good for him. He runs after the girls something terrible. Probably was on his way to meet one of the maids at Bogwell Farm.

FITZBROWN (*rising, walking away*): Yes, yes, I know. Get me my bag, will you? Thanks.

(*Surgery door opens. Sound of wind and rain. He shudders.*)

Vile night.

URSE CALLUM: What shall I do if Mrs. Jukes . . . ?

ITZBROWN (*cuts her short*): She can wait. I shan't be long. The man's either dead or for the hospital.

(*Door shuts. Car starts. He drives away. Fade.*)

(*Narrating.*) It *was* a vile night. The drizzle cut across my vision in gusts, and the masked headlights penetrated only a few yards of the blackness ahead. I knew the cottage Nurse Callum had spoken of. It had formerly housed a farm labourer. I also knew by sight the married couple who had taken it, though I had never visited them. They were said to be well-connected but rather hard up, and very friendly with Colonel Dall of Bogwell Farm, and the woman who was known as Mrs. Dall but wasn't.

These thoughts, and the faint contempt—or is it envy?—we harassed and overworked people feel for the idle and irresponsible, occupied my mind until I drew up in the lane outside the Scott-Wallikers' cottage . . .

(*Car draws up.* FITZBROWN *knocks at front door and after a moment walks in. Those present are:* MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER [TOPSY]; COLONEL *and* MRS. DALL; *the* DISTRICT NURSE [APPLEBY]; WILCOX.)

Good-evening.

: Good evening.

FITZBROWN: Good evening, Nurse. Was it you who found him?

NURSE APPLEBY: No, Doctor: Mr. Wilcox here.

FITZBROWN: Where's Barnes?

NURSE APPLEBY: Here, Doctor, on the sofa.

FITZBROWN: Let's see. (*Quick examination.*) Well, Nurse, nothing we can do here. He's dead. Better ring up Sergeant Collis.

NURSE APPLEBY: Yes, Doctor. (*She goes.*)

FITZBROWN: You found him?

WILCOX: Yes, Doctor. He was lying in the middle of the road with his motor-bike on top of him. There was an awful smell of petrol.

FITZBROWN: Was he alive?

WILCOX: Eh?

FITZBROWN (*impatiently*): Was he alive when you found him? Did he make any sound—groan or heavy breathing?

WILCOX: No, Doctor, not that I noticed.

FITZBROWN: What did you do when you found him?

WILCOX: I saw the light here, and I came straight and knocked.

MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER: I'm afraid our black-out curtains don't fit very well. My name's Scott-Walliker, Doctor.

COLONEL DALL: You know me, Doctor: Dall of [illegible] well Farm. Perhaps you think we shouldn't have moved him. But we did it as carefully as we could. It didn't seem a good idea to leave him out there in the rain and the dark, lying in the middle of the road.

FITZBROWN: Quite so. It didn't matter. He's probably been dead about an hour. Judging by the look of him, he was killed outright. Were you here then?

MRS. DALL: Well, yes, I suppose we were——

COLONEL DALL: My wife, Doctor.

MRS. DALL: We got here soon after eleven, and were having a rubber of bridge before going to the Country Club.

FITZBROWN: And you heard nothing? No sounds of crash? If he had a skid, I should have thought you'd have heard the brakes.

MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER (*clearly and boldly*): We had the wireless on.

FITZBROWN: Must have been on very loud. Didn't disturb your game?

MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER: I didn't notice it. I don't even remember what the programme was. Some foreign station, wasn't it?

MRS. DALL: I think so. I wasn't listening.

FITZBROWN: Three-handed bridge, was it?

MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER (*anxiously and quickly*): My husband has gone to bed. He knows nothing of this. Please don't disturb him, Doctor. He has been very ill, and it might upset him. I'll tell him myself—later. Anyway, he won't have heard anything if *we* didn't. He's very deaf.

COLONEL DALL: Badly damaged in Burma.

FITZBROWN: I see. Well, there'll be an inquest, of course. (NURSE APPLEBY *returns.*) Ah, Nurse: did you get through to Sergeant Collis?

NURSE APPLEBY: Yes, Doctor: he'll be along at once. Shall I clean him up a bit?

FITZBROWN: Yes, you can. Extraordinary amount of blood on him. Look at his mackintosh.

NURSE APPLEBY: Yes. But (*lowering her voice*) d'you see, Doctor, his *hands* are quite clean? I noticed it at once against his coat. You'd expect the palms to be a bit muddy if he'd fallen off his bike.

FITZBROWN: Yes. Well, let Collis have a look at him, before you do anything. Does his wife know?

NURSE APPLEBY: Not yet, Doctor. I'll call in and tell her on my way past.

FITZBROWN: Yes, do. She'd better not see him like this. Stop her from seeing him at all if you can. Tell Collis I'll call in the morning and give him my report. He won't be able to find out how it happened till daylight. Ask him to give me a ring early if I'm wanted for the p.m.

NURSE APPLEBY: I will, Doctor.

(*'Good nights' are exchanged.* FITZBROWN *goes. His car is heard starting, driving away.*)

FITZBROWN (*narrating*): As I drove home, I was thinking, "No doubt it *was* just a skid—but why were they all so determined to pretend they hadn't heard anything? Mrs. Scott-Walliker, for instance: she doesn't look like a liar. And yet—why did she cover up her husband so eagerly? If I hadn't noticed there were four glasses on the table—she saw me glance at them—she'd have pretended he hadn't been there. Why? there was genuine anxiety in her tone—and yet I'm sure she was lying. . . . As for the Colonel and his red-haired lady friend, I wouldn't trust either of them any further than I can see now, which is about five yards. . . ."

Next morning, after an all-night session seeing Mrs. Jukes's twins into the world, I got through my surgery as quickly as possible and went to call on Sergeant Collis at our local police station . . .

P.-S. COLLIS: The P.M. is taking place this morning in Chode, Doctor, but Superintendent Mallett doesn't think it necessary to trouble you, unless of course you want to take a hand. Dr. Jones can handle it.

FITZBROWN: When's the inquest?

COLLIS: Tomorrow at eleven. You'll be wanted for that.

FITZBROWN: So you're satisfied it was an accident?

COLLIS: As far as I can see at present, Doctor. I'm not a man to invent trouble, you know.

FITZBROWN: You've seen Barnes's wife, I suppose? How's she taking it?

COLLIS: Not too badly, considering. Bit of a shock, naturally.

FITZBROWN: What did Barnes go out for last night, do you know?

COLLIS: Mrs. Barnes says, to post a letter.

FITZBROWN: What time?

COLLIS: She thinks about 7.25 p.m.

FITZBROWN: H'm. Just as I thought: he must have been dead about an hour. Funny time to post a letter. The last post goes at 3.45 p.m. from the box at Bogwell cross-roads.

COLLIS: He'd get the morning post at 9 a.m.

FITZBROWN: Surely he left for work before that. He was a motor mechanic. He'd have to be at his job by 8 a.m. In fact, I've seen him at the garage before nine, I'm sure, and the post office is almost next door.

COLLIS (*thoughtfully*): That's true. Maybe it was an excuse. Nurse Appleby says he was known to be running after Susie Day, one of the young girls at Colonel Dall's place. And strangely enough, that's where he had his skid—if it was a skid: just outside the gate leading to Bogwell Farm. It's only a few yards from the cottage where they took him afterwards, if you remember.

FITZBROWN: I know.

COLLIS: Are you thinking there's more in this than

meets the eye, Doctor? If so—well, I was just going to cycle there and take another look at the road and the surroundings. You wouldn't care to come along?—that is, if you're not too busy.

FITZBROWN (*with alacrity*): I'll drive you there.

(*Narrating.*) I drew my car up on the grass verge some distance before we reached the spot where Barnes had been killed, and within view of the Scott-Wallikers' cottage. As we passed the cottage, I noticed Barnes's motor-cycle leaning against the wall just inside the small front garden. The morning was bright and sunny, and the tarmac road had dried except in the deep gutters at the sides. But the bloodstains were still there. By some chance the largest pool of blood, on the high crown of the road, had been missed by the wheels of the few subsequently-passing vehicles, and the occasional blotches visible at the side and on the grass were likewise untouched. In front of the five-barred gate leading to Colonel Dall's farm, the grass verge had been trampled by the cows that had been driven through at milking-time the previous evening. We walked to and fro, examining the stains, while Collis took measurements and made his notes . . . (*Fade.*)

(*Throughout this scene, the occasional mooing of a cow, very mournful, is heard in the distance.*)

I don't see any skid marks, Collis.

COLLIS: No. They've been washed away by the rain, I guess.

FITZBROWN (*sharply*): What's this? Oh, yes—oil from his motor-bike. An amazing amount of blood, Collis, for a head wound.

COLLIS (*pursuing his own line of thought*): Wilcox—the chap who found him—says he ran straight to the

Scott-Wallikers' cottage. The Dalls were there. They were playing cards and had the wireless on full blast, and Wilcox had a job to make himself heard. But when he did get them to hear, Colonel Dall came at once. He says they lifted the bike off the body and then stood the bike up against the bank—here. Then they lifted Barnes to the side of the road and the Colonel went to warn the ladies and get a plank and blankets for a stretcher.

FITZBROWN: Why didn't he get the stretcher first?

COLLIS: I told him he should have, but he said the idea was to get Barnes off the road at once, in case something came along in the dark and ran over him.

FITZBROWN: So he told me. Funny he didn't phone you *then*—and me.

COLLIS: I suppose he got flustered.

FITZBROWN: A colonel?

COLLIS: With a skinful—as a rule. Well, anyhow, it didn't matter much if Barnes was dead already—about lifting him, I mean.

FITZBROWN: If Barnes was dead, how do we account for all this blood, not only on the road but on the grass verge? A man doesn't bleed after he's dead.

COLLIS (*doubtfully*): Couldn't some of the blood have been sort of wiped off his clothes on to the grass?

FITZBROWN: I'll take a couple of specimens. We'll have a few blades of grass—*so*—and I think a square-inch of tarmac from the road—*so* (*clicking of penknife; effort of cutting*)—from the middle of this pool of blood. Any objections?

COLLIS: Er—no. Have you got anything to put it in?

FITZBROWN (*rattling tin box containing pills*): This'll do. The tablets are only cascara. There. Now you've witnessed that these specimens are correctly

labelled: one tuft of grass; one square-inch of tarmac plus blood from Bogwell lane . . . (*Murmurs the rest. The distant cow bellows loudly and lamentingly.*)

COLLIS (*sceptical*): What are you going to do with that, if I may ask?

FITZBROWN: Did you say Dr. Jones was doing the P.M.?

COLLIS: Yes.

FITZBROWN: Then he gets these as well. He'll be dealing with the bloodstains on Barnes's clothes.

COLLIS: Well, but—we *know* they're the same. I don't quite see——

FITZBROWN: Maybe you will — and maybe not. (*Straightens himself.*) Now, let's go and have a look at that motor-bike. (*They begin walking away.*) Hullo! What's this? A tyre-mark—deep, too. The grass verge is soft here. Must have been a lorry. Know anything about it?

COLLIS (*promptly*): Oh, yes: we're not as unobservant as all that, Doctor! That's the lorry from the W.D. Camp at Rushfield. We've been in touch with them this morning. It's the one that brings out the supplies from Chode three times a week.

FITZBROWN: Who's the driver?

COLLIS: His name's Jenkins. I cycled down there and had a word with him . . . (*Fade.*)

Your name's Jenkins?

JENKINS: That's right.

COLLIS: You're the driver of the lorry that brings up supplies from Chode?

JENKINS: That's right.

COLLIS: You pulled in there yesterday evening, on the grass verge opposite the gate leading to Bogwell Farm?

JENKINS: That's right.

COLLIS: What for?

JENKINS: Well, it's like this, see: I pulls in there sometimes on my way back to Camp and calls at the Blacksmith's Arms for a pint of bitter.

COLLIS: That's ten minutes' walk away.

JENKINS: It's the only place where the lane's wide enough and I can get my near wheels off the road.

COLLIS: Why don't you park in the inn yard?

JENKINS (*guffaws*): Well, I don't like to do *that*. This stop's off the record.

COLLIS: You parked your lorry there—that is, opposite Bogwell Farm—yesterday evening on your way back to Camp. What time?

JENKINS: I got there shortly before seven.

COLLIS: And you went straight to the Blacksmith's Arms?

JENKINS: That's right.

COLLIS: How long did you stay there?

JENKINS: About half an hour.

COLLIS: And you then drove back to Camp here. You say you saw nothing of the accident?

JENKINS: That's right. I just climbed on to the driving-seat and drove off. About 7.50, that would be. You can ask the Corporal what time I got back here. And you can ask at the pub: plenty of people saw me there between 7.10 and 7.40.

COLLIS: You don't think he crashed into the lorry in the dark, while you were away?

JENKINS: Couldn't have. There's no marks on the lorry anywhere. Me and the Corporal's been over it with a magnifying glass, and he couldn't find nothing either. The poor devil must've had a skid . . . (*Fade.*)

COLLIS: So you see there's no reason to doubt Jenkins's story. I checked up on his times at the pub and at

the Camp. Also, his lorry has a left-hand drive, so he could easily have climbed in on the near side without seeing Barnes lying in the middle of the lane. No, I'm bound to agree, it must have happened while he was in the pub and he drove off again without noticing. . . .

FITZBROWN (*as* COLLIS *begins walking off again*): Wait a minute, Collis! Look here! Look at that!

COLLIS: Where?

FITZBROWN: Here. Don't you see anything?

COLLIS: I see some footprints: Jenkins's, I guess.

FITZBROWN: No, no, not those: this.

COLLIS: A small hole filled with water. (*Sceptically.*) What do *you* think it is, Doctor?

FITZBROWN: I think it's the impression of a woman's high-heeled shoe. Luckily the clay has held the impression in spite of the rain. Come on, Collis, we must get a cast of this. You know how?

COLLIS: Well, I haven't got any materials here.

FITZBROWN: Step along to my car and get me my case, will you? I've got some plaster of Paris there. Yes —I think we can do it easily without preparation, as it's clay. I'll see if I can syphon the water out. . . .

(COLLIS *goes to car. Car door opens and shuts. He returns with case.*)

Thanks. (*Sounds of rattling objects in case.*) Now some water from the ditch. Easy enough. Consistency of thin cream. Pour into hole. I believe we've got something here, Collis!

COLLIS (*sceptically*): I hope so, I'm sure.

FITZBROWN (*rising*): There. Now let's leave it to set. We can go and have a look at that motor-bike. *They walk across road, open latched gate of Scott-Wallikers' cottage, walk up path.* FITZBROWN *lifts*

motor-cycle up on its stand. Blows horn.) Doesn't seem much wrong with it, does there—to look at, anyway. The lamp's all right. Handle-bars not bent. Pedal—h'm—slightly bent upward. Let's try the engine. (*He kicks over the starter.*)

COLLIS: Turn on the petrol, sir.

FITZBROWN (*kicks starter over again. The engine starts and runs perfectly. He engages gears. Tries brakes*): Everything perfect—gears—brakes—engine. Tyres new. Nothing to account for a skid. Well-kept in every way——

COLLIS: He was a motor-mechanic.

FITZBROWN: —Everything shining. Doesn't look as if he fell off very heavily. Nothing really damaged or bent. And yet—— I say! Look at this!

COLLIS: Where?

FITZBROWN: Here—between the front number-plate and the mudguard. Where are my forceps? Now! What d'you make of that, eh?

COLLIS: It looks like a tuft of red hair.

FITZBROWN: Don't breathe too hard: you might blow it away. Now: who has red hair? One of the ladies?

COLLIS: Well, Doctor, the Colonel's lady has what you might *call* red hair.

FITZBROWN: This isn't *her* hair. Hers is dyed, and a much brighter colour. *This* hair is the colour of a ripe horse-chestnut. Wait a minute: I've got my pocket-lens here. Let's have a look. This hair is coarser—more tufty—*lovely* colour. Didn't come out of a bottle. By jove, Collis!

COLLIS: What is it?

FITZBROWN: This isn't human hair at all! It's cow's hair. It comes from the hide of one of those fine Hereford cattle Colonel Dall is rearing at Bogwell

Farm. It must be one of *his* cows, because all the others round here are Frisians. Now I wonder——

COLLIS: You don't think Barnes ran into one of Colonel Dall's cows in the dark?

FITZBROWN: He could have. But what on earth would a milch-cow be doing in the lane at that time?

COLLIS: It might have escaped.

FITZBROWN: True: that *has* been known. Well, there's one way of finding out. You go along to Bogwell Farm and see the Colonel, and ask if any of his cows is missing or injured. There can't be any reason why he should conceal it if there is.

COLLIS: Right.

FITZBROWN: And while you're there, see if you can find out anything about that girl Susie Day that Barnes is said to have been chasing: for instance, whether she was out last night—and whether she wears high-heeled shoes.

COLLIS: Right you are, Doctor.

FITZBROWN: Meanwhile, I'll call on the Scott-Wallikers here. I think I see someone hovering behind that curtain upstairs. They must be wondering what we're doing in their front garden. By the time you get back, our plaster cast will have set.

COLLIS: Okay.

(FITZBROWN *goes up to cottage door and knocks. Door opens at once.*)

MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER: Oh, come in, Doctor! (*He goes in.*) Well, have you found the cause of the accident?

FITZBROWN: Not exactly, Mrs. Scott-Walliker.

MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER: Just a skid, wasn't it? The roads were very slippery last night.

FITZBROWN: Perhaps. But (*cautiously*)—there are some rather puzzling features.

MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER (*brightly and nervously*): For instance?

FITZBROWN: The damage to the man was too great for a mere tumble. But the damage to the machine was too little for a skid or a collision.

MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER: A collision?

FITZBROWN: There *is* that possibility. It seems that an Army lorry parks there on the opposite side of the road sometimes. It was there last night for half an hour.

MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER: Yes—I've noticed it occasionally.

FITZBROWN: You didn't hear it last night, between seven and eight?

MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER (*dubiously*): I don't think so.

FITZBROWN: You were in this room all the time? *All* of you?

MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER (*hastily*): Yes, yes, I told you. We were playing bridge.

FITZBROWN: *Three*-handed bridge?

MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER: Well, not *all* the time. . . .

FITZBROWN: Who was the fourth? Your husband?

(*Sound at door. Enter* DICK SCOTT-WALLIKER. MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER *gasps.*)

DICK SCOTT-WALLIKER (*harshly*): Good morning. You're the doctor, aren't you? You've come about the accident, I suppose.

FITZBROWN: Yes. Can you help me at all? I was just asking your wife if any of you heard an Army lorry drive up or drive away between seven and eight yesterday evening. . . .

DICK SCOTT-WALLIKER (*interrupting*): Wait a minute. I can't hear you. I'm deaf, you know: bust eardrums. Topsy, where's that damned hearing-aid? Oh, here it is. (*Sounds of extracting hearing-aid from*

plant-pot.) I can hear pretty well with this thing as a rule. Now: go ahead. You'll have something to drink?

FITZBROWN: No, thank you—not at this hour. But—I'd like a cup of coffee, if it's not too much trouble.

MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER (*rather fiercely*): Not at all. (*She goes out, shutting door sharply.*)

FITZBROWN: Sorry to get rid of your wife so obviously, but I wanted a word with you alone. So you don't hear anything without your apparatus?

DICK SCOTT-WALLIKER: Very little.

FITZBROWN: Then it's no use my asking *you* if you heard anything last night.

DICK SCOTT-WALLIKER: I'm afraid not.

FITZBROWN: Weren't you wearing your hearing-aid when you were playing bridge?

DICK SCOTT-WALLIKER: Yes, of course. But I think I must have taken it off when I stepped outside.

FITZBROWN: Oh, so you *did* step outside! What time would that be?

DICK SCOTT-WALLIKER: I suppose it must have been around seven-thirty. (*Confidingly.*) Funny thing, Doctor—I *did* hear something too, very faintly—like a backfire. Sharp sounds do come through to me sometimes. Perhaps it was imagination. But I don't think so, because I remember thinking, "If only I could *hear* again, I think all my troubles would be solved." It drives you mad, sometimes, you know, to feel so cut off from everything. Ah well——

FITZBROWN: I know. Like a back-fire, you say?

DICK SCOTT-WALLIKER: Yes. I jumped. It reminded me of—well, plenty of things I want to forget. (*Laughs apologetically.*) In fact, it quite upset me. I went straight to bed when I came in, and the

other three played on, I believe. I knew nothing about the accident until this morning when my wife told me.

(MRS. SCOTT-WALLIKER *enters with coffee. She begins setting out cups.*)

FITZBROWN: I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Scott-Walliker, but I'm afraid I've bothered you for nothing. I've just remembered: I have an appointment in Chode. Well, good-bye—If I were you, I'd inquire into the possibilities of a fenestration. It might give you your hearing back. We'll discuss it some time if you like. . . . (*Goes.*)

(*Narrating.*) When I got back to the place where my plaster cast was waiting, Collis was there too. . . . (*Fade.*)

A perfect cast, Collis. Note where I got it. I may need your confirmation. Did you find out anything at Bogwell Farm? What about the cow?

COLLIS: There's no cow injured or missing, though one of them appears to be sick and they're keeping it in the shed for today. It was bellowing, and I asked to see it. The Colonel made no objection.

FITZBROWN: A red Hereford?

COLLIS: Yes—but no sign of any damage. The Colonel said it was a bit out of sorts, that's all.

FITZBROWN: And the girl—Susie Day?

COLLIS: Was in all evening with the cook. I seem to have drawn a blank. But I don't know: I'm coming round to your point of view, Doctor. There's something fishy here. It's the Colonel and his—well, this so-called Mrs. Dall. They're hiding something. They're too bright and chatty altogether.

FITZBROWN: Listen, Collis: I'm going straight to the laboratory to get Dr. Jones's report. Meanwhile, will you go down to the Camp and have another

look at that lorry? Check up again on the driver —on his habits. Find out if he's usually late, and anything else you can. But above all, examine the *inside* of the lorry.

COLLIS: But if Barnes crashed into the lorry, the damage will be on the outside.

FITZBROWN: Don't bother with the outside. This is no accident. Examine the inside, I tell you. Look for traces of anything suggesting the presence of a *woman*: heel-prints like this cast, for instance, or a hairpin, or anything women wear. Then ring me up at the police station at Chode in half an hour. Understood?

COLLIS: Okay, Doctor—though I don't quite see——

FITZBROWN: *Cherchez la femme*, Collis—and hurry. I'll drop you at the Camp. Jump in. I must see Dr. Jones immediately. (*Car drives off. Fade.*)

(FITZBROWN *and* DR. JONES *in mortuary. Footsteps on stone in hollow place.*)

DR. JONES: Well, here you are, Fitzbrown. Take a look at him for yourself. I saw it as soon as I'd cleaned the blood off the back of his head. The District Nurse put me on to it: she said she could feel it. I thought it was her imagination—but not at all.

FITZBROWN: Just as I thought. H'm. I take it, Jones, the bullet entered *here* at the base of the skull——

DR. JONES: Yes, and was embedded in the brain—*here*. It was fired from a .38 revolver, at a distance of a few feet, I should say.

FITZBROWN: Just so—but look here: what's all *this*? *This* can't have been caused by any shot.

DR. JONES: No. Somebody gave him a great bash on the forehead and fractured his skull.

FITZBROWN: What with?

DR. JONES: Don't know. Could have been a brick—anything.

FITZBROWN: And the blood?

DR. JONES (*chuckling*): Cow's blood, my boy! Somebody deluged him in it—face, head, clothes—to give the effect of an accident.

FITZBROWN (*calmly*): Fine! Well, now you won't need my specimens. Here they are: some grass, and a square-inch of road. (*Lays tin box on table.*) What do we do now?

DR. JONES: Mallett's gone off in person to examine the venue. He left ten minutes ago, as soon as he had my report. You must have passed him. He's sending a couple of men to search all the local ditches and earth-closets for the revolver. I gather from the District Nurse nobody heard anything?

FITZBROWN: Scott-Walliker says he heard something he took to be a back-fire.

DR. JONES: She also says this chap Scott-Walliker is not only deaf but cracked. War injury.

FITZBROWN: I know. But he doesn't seem mad to me.

DR. JONES: He was in West Park Mental Hospital for three months having shock therapy. Then he went berserk one day—thought he was still on the Chindwin—and attacked a male nurse. So they put him to sleep for a fortnight. He was let out—cured—some two months ago.

FITZBROWN: Doesn't sound good, I agree. But why should he shoot Barnes?

DR. JONES: Oh, a black-out, I suppose. Sound of motor-bike suggested war—ambush—snipers——

FITZBROWN: But good lord, all that cow's blood! Where did *that* come from?

DR. JONES: Search me. Maybe he thinks he's Dracula.

FITZBROWN: And look at this! (*Envelope crackles.*)

DR. JONES: What's that? A love-lock? Thought you were a confirmed bachelor, Fitzbrown.

FITZBROWN: Cow's hair—from the front number-plate of Barnes's motor-bike.

DR. JONES: So Barnes was first shot—then he collided with a cow! It doesn't make sense.

FITZBROWN: No, it doesn't—not yet. But it will. I'll go after Mallett as soon as my phone-call from Collis comes through.

POLICE-CONSTABLE (*at door*): Sergeant Collis on the phone, sir. Would like to speak to Dr. Fitzbrown.

FITZBROWN: So long, Jones. This is it, I fancy. . . . (*Narrating.*) As I drove back along the lane, past the Blacksmith's Arms, turning over the confirmation I had received from Collis, I saw the District Nurse riding ahead of me on her old-fashioned bicycle. I pulled up beside her. She dismounted . . . (*Fade.*)

NURSE APPLEBY: Good morning, Doctor!

FITZBROWN (*opening car door*): Step inside, Nurse. I want a word with you. (*Car door shuts.*) Have you seen Mrs. Barnes this morning?

NURSE APPLEBY: I was just going there now. There's no need, really—she's not ill—but I thought I'd look in as I was passing.

FITZBROWN: Quite right. What sort of a woman is she? I gather she had reason to be dissatisfied with Barnes.

NURSE APPLEBY: He was after all the young girls in the district if he could get near them. I'm sorry to speak ill of the dead—but he was no loss to her.

FITZBROWN: What about this girl Susie Day? What is *she* like?

NURSE APPLEBY: Oh, a country girl—about sixteen, but quite willing to learn, if you follow me, Doctor.

(*Lowering her voice.*) Mrs. Barnes thought he was going to post a letter last night, but actually he had a date with this Susie. Shows you, doesn't it?

FITZBROWN: He had? But Susie wasn't out last night, so I'm told.

NURSE APPLEBY: Well, Doctor, that's as may be. But she wrote a note asking him to meet her.

FITZBROWN: Did she now? How do you know?

NURSE APPLEBY: I saw it. You see, I called at the Barnes's cottage yesterday evening shortly before seven, about the money for the Nursing Association. Mrs. Barnes helps us with her singing, you know. Lovely voice, she has—like a prima donna. I often say she's wasted here. However, she'd gone out for a minute. The lights were all on and the back door was unlatched, so I just knocked and walked in. Barnes's supper was laid out on the table and the kettle was simmering on the hob, but Mrs. Barnes wasn't there. Then I saw a note on the table by his plate. I glanced at it—you know how these things catch the eye—and I'd read it before I realised. It said: MEET ME BY THE GATE, 7.30. SUSIE. It was printed in big capitals. You couldn't miss it.

FITZBROWN (*opens his case*): Is Susie the sort of girl who'd wear a shoe with a heel like this?

NURSE APPLEBY: What is it, Doctor?

FITZBROWN: It's a plaster cast of the heel of some woman's shoe. Could it be Susie's?

NURSE APPLEBY: Oh no, Doctor! She's in the flat heel stage, a regular country bumpkin if you know what I mean. That's what's so funny, Joe Barnes running after these raw youngsters when he's used to something so much better. Must have liked a contrast.

FITZBROWN: Thank you, Nurse. You've saved me a lot of time. (*Opens door, lets her out, slams door.*) You go along and see her. Maybe I'll call myself later. (*Starts car, drives off . . . fade.*)

(*Narrating.*) I drove along to Bogwell Farm. In the kitchen I found Superintendent Mallett. Confronting him were Colonel and Mrs. Dall, looking considerably put out. Mallett was talking . . . (*Fade.*)

MALLETT (*sternly*): You people are concealing something. It's inconceivable to me that you heard nothing—no shot, no sound of a crash—when all this took place not thirty yards away. I must remind you that this was not an accident—it was murder. (*Irritably, as* FITZBROWN *enters.*) Yes, Doctor: what is it?

FITZBROWN: May I handle this, Superintendent? I think I know what happened. These people aren't guilty of murder—but they've been doing something very stupid: trying to destroy evidence—covering up a crime. Luckily for you, Colonel, you were mistaken. Scott-Walliker didn't shoot Joe Barnes.

MRS. DALL: Dick didn't do it?

FITZBROWN: No. Now listen to me. Scott-Walliker left you all while you were playing bridge, at about seven-thirty. He went into the garden. While he was outside, you heard a shot. What made you think he'd fired it?

MRS. DALL: We thought nothing of it at the time. We thought it was a back-fire from a passing car. But when we heard Dick come in and go straight upstairs, we thought he was having one of his fits of depression. He had been rather nervy and irritable all evening.

FITZBROWN: Yes?

MRS. DALL: Topsy was worried: she was always afraid in case his old trouble came back. She couldn't give her mind to bridge any longer, so Roddy and I said we'd leave her to cope. When we got outside, we saw a man's body lying in the road opposite our gate.

FITZBROWN: Where was the motor-cycle? Did you notice?

COLONEL DALL: It was leaning against the bank near the gate. That's how I knew it wasn't an accident. I went and examined the man in the light of my torch, and I could feel a hole in the back of the skull—here.

FITZBROWN: Any blood?

COLONEL DALL: Very little. At once we remembered the shot we'd heard when Scott-Walliker had gone out, and we thought, "He's done it again!"

MALLETT: Why? Has he ever killed anyone before?

COLONEL DALL: Plenty, in Burma, I imagine. But not since. He did go for one of the attendants at the mental home, but he tried to strangle him—or so the chap said. We don't know the whole of that story. However, we knew he had a revolver, so I thought he must have had another black-out.

FITZBROWN: Quite so. And your one idea was to cover him. So you, Mrs. Dall, went back to the cottage and told Mrs. Scott-Walliker what had happened and what you planned, while the Colonel went back to the farm and drew a couple of pints of blood from one of his Hereford cows. Is that right?

MRS. DALL (*weeping*): We did it for the best. Dick and Topsy Scott-Walliker are the only people here who've been kind to us——

FITZBROWN: And you, Colonel, also snipped off a few hairs to adorn the front of the machine and make it look as if Barnes had collided with a cow in the dark.

COLONEL DALL (*complacently*): Quite so. Not a bad idea, what?

FITZBROWN: Then you came back, hit the dead man pretty hard on the forehead, scattered the cow's blood over him and on the road, and laid the motor-cycle over him. Then you joined the ladies, turned on the radio, and waited for someone to find the body.

COLONEL DALL: Correct. Congratulations, Doctor.

MALLETT: You'll get into serious trouble for this, Colonel.

COLONEL DALL: Worth it for a friend.

FITZBROWN: Never mind that now, Mallett. I want you to come with me, please, and quickly.

MALLETT: Where?

FITZBROWN: To Barnes's cottage. I'll explain on the way. (*Fade.*)

(*Narrating.*) The District Nurse was still there drinking a cup of tea and gossiping with Mrs. Barnes when we walked in: Superintendent Mallett Police-Sergeant Collis, and I. Both women let out a sort of gasp, and Mrs. Barnes stood up, looking white and angry . . . (*Fade.*)

MRS. BARNES: Doctor! How you startled me! Is there anything new?

MALLETT (*grimly*): Plenty, Mrs. Barnes. I am here to arrest you for the murder of your husband, Joseph Barnes, yesterday evening, November 7th, between seven-ten and seven-forty p.m. You are not obliged to say anything, but anything you may say may be [redacted] evidence. . . .

MRS. BARNES: It's a lie, it's a lie! It was that girl Susie Day! She killed him! She was meeting him there last night, outside the gate as usual. She sent him a note. I can show it to you. . . .

FITZBROWN: Don't bother, Mrs. Barnes. We know you printed that note yourself, to get your husband to go there. What wife would leave a note from another girl to her husband, unless she was up to something?

MALLETT: Careful, Fitzbrown. She's not obliged . . .

MRS. BARNES (*screaming*): A lie, a lie!

FITZBROWN: Then you went along and hid in Jenkins's lorry. You knew his movements to the minute, didn't you? I suggest your husband was no worse than *you* were with your soldier friend—another reason for wanting to get rid of him. . . .

MALLETT: Mrs. Barnes, I strongly advise you to say nothing at present. . . .

MRS. BARNES: It's not true! I hate men—I hate them all!

FITZBROWN: When Barnes came along at seven-thirty, he leaned his machine against the bank and stood waiting for Susie. He had his back to the lorry. . . . You were hiding inside.

MALLETT: Better say no more, Fitzbrown. Mrs. Barnes, you'll have an opportunity to make a statement later if you wish——

MRS. BARNES: I wasn't there! It's not true! I was at home, waiting for Joe, and he was with Susie Day. You can't prove otherwise.

FITZBROWN: No, Mrs. Barnes? Take a look at what I'm holding in my hand. This is a plaster cast of the heel of a woman's shoe. I took this impression from the grass verge beside Jenkins's lorry. Now: if you are innocent, will you ask Nurse Appleby

to go and fetch all your high-heeled shoes?
(*Pandemonium: screams from* MRS. BARNES, *remonstrances from* COLLIS, *efforts of* NURSE APPLEBY *to control Mrs. Barnes. Fade out.*)

(*Narrating.*) I was right, of course. Mrs. Barnes was subsequently proved to have been meeting Jenkins on the nights he came by with his lorry. That was how she caught Barnes at his rendezvous with Susie Day, though he never knew. So she had a double motive. She admitted she hated Barnes because his affairs were with servant girls. She thought herself very much superior, and quite justified in what she did. She is serving a life sentence.

As for the Dalls and the Scott-Wallikers, they got off with a severe reprimand. I've seen something of them since, and have been responsible for persuading Scott-Walliker to have the ear-operation known as fenestration. He can hear perfectly now, and it has made a new man of him. Colonel Dall has married his red-haired lady; and you should hear him bragging at the Country Club . . . (*Fade.*)

COLONEL DALL: So I went along, you know, and got a big syringe and drew off about a quart of the old cow's blood. Ha, ha! Gertie was her name, I remember. And how she bellowed! All the next day. I often tell Dick and Topsy, our friendship's cemented in Gertie's blood. . . .

(*Fade out on cow bellowing.*)

Money is Honey

MICHAEL GILBERT

(i)

"FOR the dear Lord's sake go down and deal with Mallet direct," said Mr. Coates, senior partner of rriman Brewer and Coates, solicitors, of Lincoln's , to his young partner Mr. Bohun. "He was on the lephone to me yesterday afternoon for two hours. My ear still feels the size of a water-melon. You know uch about his blasted companies as I do. Ask your- down to lunch. It's only ninety minutes out of rpool Street. You'll like Humble Bee House. It nds a sort of stockbroker Gothic joke, actually it's y Victorian and rather nice——"

urther telephoning followed, and at half-past twelve ry Bohun stood at the wrought iron gates of Humble House. He saw at once what Coates had meant. place had been built as a gentleman's residence at ry bad period of English domestic architecture, but e and nature had dealt kindly with it. Myrtle, privet laurustinus had lost planned formality and had run ther to turn the driveway into a funnel of light and de. Half-way along, on the left of the drive, a formal ken garden had slipped back to the simple grassy e from which it had been hewed; its ledges sup- ed a colony of blue-and-white hives, eight or ten ll ones clustered round a large one. In the tember sunlight the bees were pottering about, king their last preparations for winter.

Next moment he was startled to see a fox look out at him. He stopped. The fox grinned, crossed the drive, and disappeared silently. Bohun wondered if he ought to do something about it. Would it be correct to shout View Halloo! He was too much of a Londoner to feel any certainty about the matter.

The door was opened by a middle-aged maid. He announced his business, and was shown into a large, dark room intersected with book-cases, and branching out into unexpected window-seats and embrasures, so that it had the appearance of three or four separate rooms in one.

"By the way," said Bohun, as the maid was about to withdraw, "I don't know if you knew—but you've got a fox in your front garden."

"There's a badger, too," said the maid. "They belong to Master Norman. I'll ask if Mr. Mallet can see you."

Reflecting that he had come all the way from London at Mr. Mallet's express invitation, it seemed to Bohun conceivable that he might. However, he merely nodded and sat down. The maid withdrew and Bohun opened his brief-case and sorted out the papers dealing with the Mallet-Sobieski Trustee and Debenture Corporation.

Click-click-click-click. Clickety-click.

Bohun looked up from his papers.

Click-click. Clickety-click-click-click.

Too regular for a cricket. Too loud for a death-watch beetle.

After standing it for a few minutes he put down his papers and moved softly across the carpet. The noise seemed to come from behind a parapet of bookshelves in the far corner of the room.

When he rounded the corner he was surprised to find that he had not been alone in the room after all. A tall

man with a thick moustache and one eye was sitting on the edge of the window-seat. He was rattling three dice in his large, brown right hand, and turning them out on to the table in front of him.

"Morning," he said. "You the lawyer?"

"That's right," said Bohun.

"Bloody house, isn't it? Poker dice. Fancy a game? My name's Rix—Major Rix."

"Mine's Bohun," said Bohun. "No, thank you. I'm just waiting to see Mr. Mallet."

"Doubt if you'll be able to," said Rix. "He's pretty ill, you know."

Bohun looked surprised.

"It must have been very sudden," he said. "He spent most of yesterday afternoon talking to my partner on the telephone. I gather he was in rather strong form."

It was Rix's turn to look surprised. "I wouldn't know about that," he said. "He's been in bed for a week. Had a stroke or something. Oh, there's that bloody man Morgan. Morgan, I say——"

"Sir?"

Although he had heard nothing the voice came from directly behind Bohun's right shoulder. A middle-aged man, in dark clothes, had come quietly into the room and added himself to the party.

"Oh, Morgan. Someone has locked the corner cupboard."

"Yes, sir. I locked it, on Mr. Mallet's orders."

"Then kindly unlock it."

"There was something you wanted?"

"You're damned right there's something I wanted," said Major Rix. "That's where the whisky lives."

Morgan moved across to the cupboard, selected a key from a ring of keys and opened the cupboard. He then went over to the sideboard, opened that, and took out

a tumbler. Into the tumbler he poured a very reasonable quantity of whisky, replaced the bottle in the cupboard, relocked the cupboard, and handed the glass to Major Rix.

He did all this in the most serious manner possible.

"There is a syphon of soda in the sideboard—if you require it, sir," he said. "That is not locked."

Major Rix said nothing at all. He simply picked up the tumbler and swirled the whisky round in it.

"Perhaps you would care to come with me," said Morgan.

"Oh—certainly." Bohun recovered himself with an effort. As he looked back he saw that the major was still sitting in his chair. His single eye had a frosty, far-away look in it.

Bohun followed Morgan up the stairs. As they reached the top a door opened and a woman came out. Pre-war Oxford, thought Bohun at once. About thirty-five. Blue-stocking, but overlaid now with a certain amount of country moss.

"Good morning?" she said, managing to turn it into a question.

"This is Mr. Bohun, Miss Rachel. He's here to see your father on business."

"Business." Miss Mallet sounded upset. "But—is Daddy well enough to see this gentleman?"

"I expect it will be important business," said Morgan. "Some matter which *has* to be attended to. You understand."

"Oh—yes, I expect that's it." Miss Mallet turned to Bohun, drawing him aside with her glance in a way which seemed to exclude Morgan from the whole conversation.

"You must be as quick as you can, Mr. Bohun. If you've brought something—something for him to

sign, get it done as quickly as possible. He's a dying man."

"He's——"

"If you'd come this way," said Morgan loudly.

Miss Mallet laid a hand on his arm.

"I want you to promise me," she said.

"I'm afraid," said Bohun carefully, "that there may be some mistake. The business I have to discuss with your father—it isn't family business at all. It's to do with his work in London. We've got quite a few important decisions to make. However—I'll certainly be as quick as I can, I promise you that."

All the time that he had been speaking she had kept hold of his arm. Morgan had taken a step forward and seemed almost ready to grasp him by the other arm. Penelope and the Suitors, thought Bohun. He was inclined to let the scene develop but it was broken up by a noise from below.

Major Rix had come out into the hall.

The drink which Morgan had poured for him must have been stronger than it looked, for even from above it could be seen that he was swaying very slightly on his feet, and he fumbled with the door handle for a few moments as he closed the door.

Miss Mallet had dropped Bohun's arm and was looking down into the hall. The expression on her face reminded him of a visitor at the zoo, some adult, intellectual spinster, peering down into the trough of the Reptile House. Detached, intrigued, very faintly nauseated.

"If you'd come along now," said Morgan.

When they had turned the corner of the corridor he halted. It was too dark for Bohun to see his face.

"I expect you haven't met Miss Rachel before," he said.

"I haven't had the pleasure——"

"Nor Master Norman?"

"No, I've never met him."

"You don't want to pay too much attention to what either of them say. They're both a little bit—you know."

Before Bohun could say anything more he had turned, knocked at a big, double door and opened it without waiting for an answer.

The room was in half-darkness, and what light there was came from a reading-lamp placed slightly behind the bed in such a way that it deepened the shadows on the face of the man who lay there.

Bohun was considerably startled at the picture. But he was even more startled when Mr. Mallet sat up vigorously from his supporting pillows. His voice, when he spoke, showed no trace of weakness.

"Where are the children, Morgan?"

"Miss Rachel has gone downstairs. Mr. Norman is out with his birds."

"Then draw the curtains back a bit. We must have some light. Fetch Mr. Bohun a chair. That's right, we can use this table. Now, Bohun—this holding company. I tried to explain it to Coates, but he seemed to find it very difficult to understand. Perhaps I oughtn't to say so, but he seems to be losing his grip a bit——"

Fortunately Bohun had met Mr. Mallet before; most people in a certain line of business in the City ran across him sooner or later. Rumour had it that he had been a sergeant major in one of the administrative branches during the First World War and had made a pile out of the barter of vehicle spare parts. Whatever truth there may have been in this was now buried in the drift of time. The early 'twenties had been spent in Company flotation, as audacious as it was profitable. After this

he had transferred his energies to the field of the Trust Corporation. At sixty he was rich and practically respectable.

"He's quite a character," Mr. Coates had warned him. "He shouts and bangs and swears and insults you and roars with laughter and sends you a dozen bottles of Scotch for Christmas. One year he sent me a box of exploding cigars. In some ways he's got a lot in common with the late Joe Stalin——"

At the end of two hours, although he had been sustained with a plate of sandwiches and a glass of milk, brought up by Morgan, Bohun felt limpish. The table was littered with papers, and Bohun was beginning to wonder whether it was he who was advising Mr. Mallet on the effect of the latest Finance Act, or vice versa. However, they had reached some sort of conclusion when steps sounded in the passage. Mr. Mallet swept the papers together, stuffed them under his pillow, turned off the second light, and sank back with a loud groan.

The door opened, and Morgan came in.

Mr. Mallet came to life at once.

"Thought it was Rachel," he said. "That's all right then. If anything further's needed, I'll telephone Coates tomorrow. I think you've got a good grasp of it, quite a good grasp."

"Thank you," said Bohun faintly.

"One other thing. If you happen to talk to either of my children before you go, would you mind remembering that I'm a dying man? I had a stroke at the beginning of the week which paralysed my left side. It hasn't affected my brain in any way, but if I should have another—which seems very possible—it may well finish me. You understand?"

"Oh, certainly," said Bohun. "I'm sorry to hear——"

"Not at all," said Mr. Mallet. "Stay to tea if you like. Morgan will drive you to the station in time for the five o'clock train."

(ii)

It was two mornings later before Bohun got round to discussing the Mallet family with Mr. Coates.

"You've never seen such a crazy set-up in your life. Either the father's mad, or the children are mad, or they're all mad——"

"I've never noticed anything actually mad about Mallet," said Coates. "You're certain he wasn't really ill?"

"I'm not a doctor," said Bohun. "Strokes are funny things. But in my view he was no more ill than——"

"Blast that telephone," said Mr. Coates. "Excuse me a moment. Who? Mr. Mallet? Oh, *young* Mr. Mallet. Put him through please——"

The telephone squeaked and bumbled. Whoever was speaking at the other end had a lot to get off his mind, and was determined to unload it fast.

At last Mr. Coates succeeded in breaking in.

"I've got Mr. Bohun here with me," he said. "Yes —that's my partner. He came down to see you two days ago. He knows all about it. When? Oh, right away. If he gets the next train he should be with you before lunch."

He rang off.

"Look here," said Bohun, "I've got Lady Maidsmoreton coming——"

"Mallet's dead," said Coates. "He died this morning. The house is in an uproar. You'll have to go and cope. Take the will with you. I've got it here. I'm sole

executor so you've got my full authority to spend any money and take any steps you like. I expect you may have to be down there a couple of days, so I'll get John Cove to look after your work. Miss Thwaites, would you mind getting hold of a taxi?"

(iii)

"Oh dear," said Norman Mallet. "Oh dear. I'm so g-glad you've g-got here, Mr.—Mr. Bohun. I'm sure it will make a great difference having you here. I'm sorry you had to walk up from the station. I couldn't find Morgan and I couldn't—I mean, he always k-keeps the keys of the car on him, so it was very awkward." He had a slight, rather pleasant stammer.

"How did it happen?" said Bohun.

"Last night. Just as he always s-said it would. Quite suddenly. Like that——" Norman snapped his fingers, then seemed to find the gesture slightly indecorous and restored his hand to his trouser pocket.

"It was between n-nine and eleven. Rachel saw him at nine. She usually went in to see him last thing at night, to tuck him up and give him his—well to make him comfortable. When Morgan went up at eleven o'clock to settle him for the night, he found him d-dead. We sent for the doctor, of course. That's Dr. Runcorn. He's up there now. You'll be able to see him."

"Did Dr. Runcorn know that your father was ill?"

"Of course. He's been father's d-doctor for years."

"But he knew about the stroke?" persisted Bohun.

"Oh, yes, he knew about that."

"Was he attending him?"

"Well, there was nothing much he could do."

The elderly parlourmaid appeared. She had been crying.

"Will Mr. Bohun be staying?" she enquired.

"Why, yes—certainly. That is, I hope you'll be staying——"

"I'd like to stop to lunch, if it wouldn't be troubling you," said Bohun. "I've booked a room at the Black Goats."

"I expect you'll be more c-comfortable there," said Norman, without making a great deal of effort to conceal his relief. "Placket, would you show Mr. Bohun up —he'd like a word with the doctor."

"It's quite all right," said Bohun. "I know the way."

He was half-way up the stairs when the study door opened and Major Rix appeared. He snapped a finger at Bohun and said, "Come on down here a moment, there's something I want to tell you."

"I'm just——"

"It's important," said Rix. "You'd better hear it."

"Oh, all right," said Bohun.

"They'll tell you Mallet died of a stroke," said Rix, as soon as the library door was shut. "Nothing further from the truth. The doctor's an old fool. He wouldn't know a stroke from German measles."

"I——" said Bohun.

"Just let me tell you this," said Rix urgently. "Mallet was murdered. Morgan did it. I don't know how. Poison or something, I should think. There's enough poison in this house to finish off the French Navy. Herbal muck. Rachel brews it. Another thing. What did Morgan slip up to London for last Thursday? Mallet never sent him. But I saw him. I was up there on business. He was coming out of some place off the Gray's Inn Road. Lot of shady chemists shops in that district. Don't tell me he was up to nothing."

Bohun hardly liked to point out that if there was plenty of poison in the house it seemed a waste of time to go all the way up to London to buy more. But Rix was beyond such considerations. He was also more than a little drunk.

"Have you any idea," he said, "why Morgan should want to do that?"

"Of course," said Rix. "You know it as well as I do. Mallet had left him five thousand under his will. He was going to change it when Rachel married me. Morgan was afraid he'd get left out of the new one. I needn't tell you."

"Er—no," said Bohun. He had Mr. Mallet's will in his pocket and was reasonably familiar with its contents. "Well, I think perhaps you ought to be rather careful about saying things like that to anyone——"

"I wouldn't say them to anyone," agreed Rix handsomely. "After all, you're just a bloody lawyer. You're paid to have things said to you."

"Quite so," said Bohun. It was a view of his professional duties which had been expressed to him before, though never quite so bluntly. He went upstairs to find the doctor.

Dr. Runcorn was just finishing. He was a dignified little sheep with a respectable crown of smooth, white hair, and muddy grey eyes. He shook Bohun's hand and said, "I'm glad you've come. The lawyer takes on where the doctor leaves off. Very sad, a busy man like him. But business-men often go that way."

"It was the stroke, then."

"A recurrence of the stroke, yes."

That seemed to be that.

Bohun said, "I know nothing about strokes, of course, but I saw him two days ago and he seemed so alert and vigorous."

"Vigorous enough in mind," said the doctor. "That's often the way. It attacks the body first."

"He seemed comparatively vigorous in body, too."

"I'm afraid I don't follow you," said Dr. Runcorn. "I saw him myself on—let me see—Monday morning, and he was completely paralysed. He could only move his head and neck."

"Then he'd made a remarkable recovery," said Bohun. "When we were discussing business on Tuesday afternoon he sat up without apparent effort, handled the various papers extremely vigorously and generally behaved like a man who was perfectly well, but happened to be taking a day's rest in bed."

"Did you see him out of bed?"

"Well—no."

"You're quite sure you're not exaggerating his other movements."

"I'm not in the habit of exaggerating," said Bohun.

"Well, it's very remarkable. But, then, nature is remarkable. It is of academic interest now, poor fellow."

"There was more to it than that," said Bohun steadily. "Once or twice in the course of our conversation he suggested that the whole of his illness was a sham. Something intended to deceive his children."

Dr. Runcorn went very red and his mouth tightened disagreeably.

"Am I to understand that you are suggesting that he deceived his medical adviser, too?"

"Well, it would be possible, wouldn't it? Who's to know? A man says to you, 'I've had a stroke. My mind is quite clear but my body won't move.' There's nothing to show, is there? Or is there?"

"There can be certain secondary symptoms——"

"Were these present in Mallet's case?"

"To a limited degree. But I'm afraid I cannot see where this is taking us. Are you suggesting that he is not dead now?"

"No," said Bohun softly, looking at the sheeted figure on the bed. "No. That is a fact that I think we will have to accept."

"Then what do you suggest, pray?"

"Perhaps a further examination into the cause of death."

"I have made my examination."

"Then I suggest a second opinion."

"And your authority for making the suggestion?"

"The lawyer," said Bohun unkindly, "takes on where the doctor leaves off. I act for the sole executor—who happens to be my partner. I will obtain his written directions if you insist."

Dr. Runcorn went white. "Really," he said. "I think you are making a mountain out of a molehill. You realise, I hope, what you are doing. Perhaps you would like the police in the house as well——"

The door crashed open. The noise and urgency of it made both men jump. It was Major Rix. He looked almost sober.

"Morgan's been shot," he said. "I just found him in the spinney at the back of the house."

(iv)

"Well, now," said Inspector Franks patiently, "and where do you come into this?"

Bohun told him where he came in.

Inspector Franks spelled his name out carefully, and said, "It's a long shot, but you wouldn't by any chance happen to know a Superintendent Hazlerigg?"

"Yes. He was a Chief Inspector when I knew him."

"Then you're the chap who doesn't go to sleep?"

"The eye that never closes," agreed Bohun.

"Ah," said Inspector Franks. He thought for a minute, and then said, "I expect it'll be a help to me, having an independent inside view, as you might say. If you've no objection."

"None at all," said Bohun. "But don't expect too much. I've known Mallet for some time, but I only met Rachel when I came down on Tuesday—and I actually saw Norman for the first time this morning."

"Norman and Rachel," said Franks. "Those would be the only children?" He turned back the pages of his book. "I've seen both of them, but I couldn't make much out of them. Both a bit young for their age, I thought."

"Retarded adolescence," agreed Bohun. "Stern parent. Not much contact with the outside world. Norman keeps foxes and badgers. Rachel brews herbs."

"Well now," said Franks. "Herbs?"

"Just before we go on with this," said Bohun, "there's a point I'd like to be quite clear on. Which death are you investigating?"

"Both, at the moment," said Franks. "Morgan could be suicide—but I don't think it is. Mallet could be natural causes. I'm keeping an open mind about that."

"Have you got someone doing the necessary?"

"Police surgeon. Yes. He won't miss much."

"Good," said Bohun. "As long as that's settled."

"I've got one or two other people to see. Perhaps you'd like to listen in. Representing the next of kin."

"That's very good of you," said Bohun, trying to conceal his surprise. It occurred to him that Hazlerigg must have given him an exceptionally good ticket.

The middle-aged maid came. Her name was Placket.

"Such a good master," she said, "and such a kind father."

"Really, now," said Franks. "No trouble at all?"

"A happy, united family," said Placket. "The children stopping at home, and not rushing off the very moment they were out of the school-room."

"Let me see. Mr. Norman is just forty and Miss Rachel is thirty-five?"

"She was thirty-five last month. I still make them each a cake on their birthday. Thirty-five candles. It has to be a big cake."

"So I should think," said the Inspector, impassively. "You say they were a happy, cheerful family? I suppose Mr. Mallet spent a lot of time up in town. What did the children do all day?"

"Employed themselves as country people should," said Placket, rather tartly. "Master Norman had his studies. He's a great naturalist. What he doesn't know about birds and beasts—but there! You'll have seen for yourself. And Miss Rachel, she collects herbs. She's published a book——"

She went over to the shelf and pulled out a volume. It was a solid-looking book and published, Bohun saw, by a well-known firm. *The Herbs and Plants of East Anglia. Their uses in Medicine and Cookery* by Rachel Mallet.

The Inspector looked happier. "I'd like to keep that for a bit."

"I expect Miss Rachel would sign it for you if you asked her," said Placket.

"Happy family," said Major Rix. "Don't you believe it. I've never seen such a little hell-kitchen in my life. Wogs, Wops and Wuzzies—I've seen 'em all. Believe me, for real hating you want to come to the English Shires."

"Well, now, that's very interesting——"

"Old Mallet was a pirate, you see. He'd got the pirate mentality. When he'd made his haul, he liked to put it in a chest and sit on it. He liked his bits and pieces all round him, where he could see 'em. Rachel and Norman were bits and pieces. If he'd had his own way, he'd just like to have had them sitting round, quietly, as if they'd been carefully preserved and put under glass. Only human nature doesn't work out like that. All it did was to make 'em branch out in other ways. Norman and his birds and bees, and Rachel and her herbs. That sort of thing. The more they tried to lead lives of their own, the more he tried to stop them. First he tried to argue them out of it—no good. Then he tried to laugh them out of it. Do you know, he got a chap to write a sort of skit of Rachel's herb book—not very funny really. I read some of it. I reckon he had to pay through the nose to get *that* published——"

"Rather an elaborate joke," said Franks.

"Oh, he was like that. Go to any lengths for a laugh. As long as it made someone else uncomfortable. Very like a man I once knew in Jamaica—trained a tortoise to drink rum. However, that's another story. Lately it's been leg-pulling. Country superstitions and that sort of thing. Norman knows 'em all. Swallows go up at night, good weather coming. Rooks fly round the trees, it's going to rain. Norman believes in 'em all."

"There are certain scientific explanations——" began Bohun, but he caught a look from Inspector Franks and subsided.

"Well, I don't know about that," said Rix. "Prefer a barometer myself. However, Mallet used to pull his leg about it properly. When they had visitors. Particularly when they had visitors. I've heard Mallet say, 'Oh, Morgan, when I was out in the garden this morn-

ing, I saw the bees flying backwards round the hive. What do you suppose that means?' And Morgan would say, solemn as a judge, 'I am given to understand, sir, that it signifies that Consols will rise two points before the next account.' And so on. The more he bullied 'em the quieter they hated him."

"Not a very happy family," said Franks.

"You're telling me."

"But you were proposing to marry into it?"

"Yes. But I wasn't going to live with them afterwards."

"You didn't anticipate any trouble, then."

"Marriage always leads to trouble," said Major Rix frankly. "It's just one of those things you've got to put up with. My last wife used to shoot at me with an air gun."

"Hmp," said Inspector Franks. "Now, about the evening of Mr. Mallet's death."

"I know just what you're going to say," said Major Rix, "and I know it didn't sound good, all that stuff I was telling you about Rachel and Norman hating their father. But it doesn't mean they killed him. It wasn't them at all. That sort of hating doesn't lead to killing. You can take my word for that. It was Morgan. I never trusted him an inch myself. Then, after he'd done it he got cold feet and went out and shot himself. I've seen that happen before."

"Yes," said Franks. "No doubt it's one of the solutions we shall have to investigate. Thank you very much for what you have told us. Meanwhile——"

"There was one thing," said Bohun. "When you found Morgan this morning—were you certain he was dead?"

"Of course I knew he was dead. I've seen lots of dead men before."

"Did you disturb the body in any way?"

"Did I—certainly not."

"To be quite specific," said Bohun. "Did you take a key from the ring of keys in his hip pocket?"

Involuntarily the Major turned to look over his shoulder at the corner cupboard. It was ajar.

"All right," he said. "Very smart of you. I borrowed the key of the drink cupboard."

"Why did you do that?" said Franks sharply.

"Well, really," said Rix. "Just because the bloody man had shot himself, I saw no reason to put all the whisky into pawn."

(v)

"Well, now," said Franks. "You'll be doing me a service if you tell me what you make of all that?"

It was evening, the oil lamp had been trimmed and lit, and they were alone in the coffee-room of the Black Goats, an ancient apartment approached by so many twisted stairs and winding corridors that it seemed improbable that anyone else should ever find his way to it.

"I don't mean the routine bits," he went on. "I shall have to wait for the reports to come in tomorrow. There's the doctor's report on Mallet and on Morgan and I've had an expert look at the gun which killed Morgan—it's an ordinary twelve-bore sporting gun from the case in the gun-room, but it might tell us something. And there's the fingerprints and photographs and so on. They might be useful." He spoke as a man who has not got a great deal of faith in fingerprints and photographs, but Bohun was not deceived.

He did not know much about police routine, but he

did know that most cases were solved by simple hard work on matters of detail by a great number of policemen.

"It's the shape of the thing that rattles me. Usually you can see which way a thing goes, right at the start. Man or woman gets killed—in nine cases out of ten it's the husband or wife who did it. That's one of the things about marriage. You do know where you are. Or else perhaps it's a professional—breaking and entering and so on. You just look up the list. But this——" He spread his hands despairingly.

"It is a bit confusing," agreed Bohun. He got up, trimmed the lamp, and sat down again sympathetically.

"First of all you've got Mallet, if that *was* murder. Even allow it's an inside job, and you've got plenty of candidates. Norman and Rachel who hated him—according to Rix. Morgan who wanted his money——"

"Oh, there's nothing in that one," said Bohun. "I've got the will here. So far as I know it's the only will Mallet made, and he never had the slightest intention of changing it. Morgan got five hundred pounds in either case—not five thousand."

"It's not always what's in a will that causes the trouble," said Franks. "It's what people think may be in it. Can you tell me what happened to the rest?"

"Oh yes, I think I can do that. There are a few other little gifts—five hundred pounds to Placket—the others are people in his London office. Then the rest goes into two parts. One half to Norman and one half to Rachel. Only she can't touch her capital. It's tied up in the usual way to prevent a husband getting hold of any of it."

"Do you suppose Rix knew that?"

"Even if he did, he was on to quite a good thing when Mallet died. They couldn't touch the capital,

but Rachel's income would have been about six thousand a year. That would have done very nicely to pay the bills—he'd have had free board and lodging, food and drink for the rest of his life. Particularly drink."

"So far as money goes then, Rix and Morgan both had motives. Only Morgan's may have been smaller than he imagined."

"That's about it," said Bohun.

"When you look at the means," said Franks, "there's nothing to choose between them. We make it as difficult as we can for people to buy poison, but the law hasn't yet got round to stopping them making it for themselves. Mallet used to have a hot whisky at nine o'clock. Almost anyone got it ready and took it up. There was no rule about it. Norman and Rachel say Morgan took it up that night. Placket says she thinks Norman did. Rachel certainly went up to see him at nine o'clock."

"And what about Morgan's death?"

"There's even less there. The gun was in a cupboard with the cartridges—not locked. Anyone could pick it up, follow Morgan into the spinney and shoot him. No one would take any notice. The fields are full of those automatic bird-scarers. They go off about once an hour."

"Then perhaps Morgan did shoot himself."

"If he did," said Franks. "All right. He's the obvious candidate for Mallet. Then the thing's reasonably straight. But if he didn't—it doesn't seem to have any shape at all. There's a piece missing somewhere."

"I'm only here to make suggestions," said Bohun. "You do the work. I'm under no delusions about that. I quite agree with what you said—the middle piece is missing, and the other pieces won't match up till you

find it. All I've got at the moment is three questions in my head. The first's a tiny matter of fact. What was Morgan doing up in London last Thursday?"

"I've got an enquiry going," said Franks. "I circulated a photograph. Unfortunately it's not a very good one—and there are quite a lot of shops in and around the Gray's Inn Road."

"All right," said Bohun. "It may be nothing."

The lamp was smoking again, and he got up to adjust it, first turning the flame right down, then carefully up again, talking as he worked. "The second question is, were the two deaths connected? I don't necessarily mean, did the same person do both. But were they logically connected? And, if so, how? The third point seems to me to be the oddest of the lot. Suppose that the post-mortem on Mallet shows that his stroke was a fake. Then what was the point of it? Mallet was a notorious joker, but his jokes always seemed to end with a *big* belly laugh for Mallet and someone else feeling all kinds of a fool. This one doesn't seem to have worked out quite like that. *What went wrong?*"

(vi)

"First report," said Franks next morning, "from the doctor, on Mallet. No sign of any cerebral congestion or hæmorrhage. In plain English. No stroke."

"So much for old Uncle Runcorn."

"Yes. Not very good. But there's more to it than that. Equivalent of three grains of hyoscine or hyoscia-mine in the stomach and digestive organs. Not materia medica stuff. Vegetable origin. Derived from distillation of the seeds of henbane, alias hogsbean, alias stinking nightshade. Probable that the dose was taken after

Mallet had his evening meal but before midnight. To be continued."

"Quite enough to go on with," said Bohun.

"I thought you'd like it. Second report. Doctor on Morgan. Suicide barely possible, but most unlikely. Position of wounds—direction of wounds—powder burns, etc., etc. You can read it for yourself."

Bohun did so. "It certainly sounds acrobatic," he agreed. "Muzzle at least twenty-four inches away from the head, but pointing practically straight at it. I really think you can rule out suicide."

"I had already done so," agreed Franks. "Listen to this. Report number three. Absolutely *no fingerprints* on the gun of any sort. Morgan wasn't wearing gloves. Tell me how he could shoot himself without leaving any prints on the gun."

"All right," said Bohun. "That's that. Anything else on Morgan?"

"General state of health. State of clothing. Contents of pockets——"

"Let's have that one."

"Wallet, money, old letters, bills. Nothing recent. Handkerchief, packet of fags. Lighter. Large pocket-knife. Key ring——"

"Key ring?"

"That checks up with Rix's story. The key of the drink cupboard was missing—and we picked up half a possible Rix fingerprint on one of the other keys. He probably touched it when he was removing the first key."

"A cool customer," said Bohun. "What other keys?"

"Two house doors, cellar and two safe keys."

"Hmp," said Bohun. "House. Cellar. Safe. Hmp?"

"One other small point. He'd got three recent bee stings. Two on his right arm, one on his left wrist."

"Had he though?" said Bohun.

He went off to telephone Coates.

"You'd better stay down there," said Coates. "I suppose there's bound to be an inquest. When they've finished cutting him up perhaps you can get him buried. The instructions are in the envelope with the will."

After lunch Franks reappeared. He had a look in his eye which meant more news.

"I've got a good identification of Morgan on his shopping expedition," he said. "The shop assistant picked the photograph straight out of a dozen without even stopping to think, bless him. I'll give you three guesses what he went up to London to buy."

"I'm not that good," said Bohun. "You tell me."

"A dictaphone. The sort of thing a business-man keeps on his desk to breathe his secret thoughts into. Not very big——" Franks demonstrated with his hands. "A small despatch-case would hold it. But powerful, and up-to-date. Records on a roll and the typist plays it back later into earphones."

Bohun digested this.

"Have you found it yet?"

"I've got every man I can lay hands on, busy now taking the house apart. If it's there I'll find it before dusk."

Dusk came.

And dark.

But no dictaphone.

(vii)

At one o'clock in the morning Bohun was sitting by himself in the wheel-back rocking-chair in the coffee-room. He had got the wick of the lamp adjusted to a

nicety now and the oil flame spread its low, warm, kind light over the dingy old room.

He was not asleep, nor even sleepy, because he suffered from para-insomnia and rarely slept more than an hour in any night. None of the doctors who had examined him had agreed about any point in his rare complaint except that one day he would drop down dead.

He knew, by experience, when he was due to sleep and until that moment it was a waste of time even to go near his bedroom. He found the night hours useful. Sometimes he wrote, sometimes he read, sometimes he thought—a luxury which few normal people can fit into their crowded waking lives.

He was thinking at that moment and he was making quite reasonable progress. For example, he was certain, now, that the double murderer was Norman Mallet. He was the only man with a real motive. As Major Rix had pointed out, people often got angry over their family's idiosyncrasies, but they very rarely killed each other on account of them. With Norman it was different. If he believed that his father was using his money to coerce Rachel into a loveless marriage with Rix, then he might well think it his duty to stop it. More particularly if he was convinced that his father was dying already. And most particularly if he saw a lawyer coming to the house. Lawyers meant settlements and new wills or codicils. From that point of view his own visit had probably timed the murder. It had set it off. And this despite the fact that both Norman's assumptions were false. His father had *not* been dying, and Bohun's visit had been *nothing* to do with his will.

Where motives were concerned, as the Inspector had so truly remarked, it wasn't what actually happened, but

what people thought was going to happen that produced results.

As for the killing of Morgan, Norman had given himself away at his very first meeting. Bohun had not observed the fact at the time, but had remembered it afterwards. Apologising for not coming to the station to fetch him, he had said, "Morgan always keeps the keys of the car on him." Now that was not true. Search of Morgan's body had shown a number of keys, but they were house keys, not the garage key, and not the car key. It seemed logical to suppose that the reason Norman had been unable to meet him was that he had been too busy murdering Morgan.

Why he had done so, and what sort of connection it could have with the death of Mr. Mallet, was the final step in this tangled business.

Franks had been right about that. There *was* a piece missing. It was the middle piece of the jigsaw puzzle, and when he saw it, all the other little edges and twists would fall into position, and a recognisable whole would appear.

What had been the point of Mallet's last great pointless practical joke?

What connection had it, if any, with his previous jokes. His ridiculing of his children's love of birds and animals and country life and country superstitions?

What use had he for a dictaphone? Why had it to be obtained secretly? And where was it now if it wasn't in Humble Bee House?

How had Morgan managed to get his wrists and arms stung three times?

There is enormous virtue in sequence. It is conceivable that if Bohun had asked himself these questions in any other order he might not have spotted the truth which, by now, was staring him in the face.

Feeling a little shaken in spite of himself he got to his feet and made his way to his bedroom. From his suitcase he took a torch and from the pocket of his coat a pair of gloves. It would be dark but there would be light enough for his purpose. And in any event, night was the best time, as Morgan had no doubt discovered. As he was leaving the inn he saw, in the corner of the hall, a heavy stick, and after a moment's hesitation he added this to his equipment.

Half an hour later he was standing once more at the gate of Humble Bee House. The driveway was a tunnel of darkness. It was the hour of false dawn, and, standing quite still, he could hear life moving in the thickets which bordered the drive. He opened the gate as quietly as he could, and the ghost of a wind set the leaves whispering, so that the news of his arrival seemed to run ahead of him up the drive.

He went silently, on the turf edge, and presently he found himself by the glade of beehives. The large one in the middle was clearly the place. He could have wished that he knew more about bees.

Putting down his torch and stick he grasped the roof very gently with both hands. It came up, in one piece, together with the top section of the hive. Underneath was nothing more alarming than a folded blanket.

He listened very carefully, and in the stillness he sensed rather than saw the legion of sleeping bees. Very gently he raised the blanket and, sure enough, there was the dictaphone, a box-like affair above the first comb-section, with its receiver immediately behind the ventilation grille in front of the hive. Carefully he lifted it, carefully replaced the blanket and hive-top. Then he tiptoed away with his spoil into the thickest part of the shrubbery.

A quarter of an hour later he was back in the bee

glade. He lifted the top and replaced the dictaphone exactly where he had found it. He stood for a moment as if undecided. Then, with a quick, almost abrupt gesture, he pulled a pencil and note-book from his pocket and, using his torch guardedly, scribbled a note. When he had finished it, he tore out the page, folded it in four, and wrote a name on the outside. Then, with the paper in his hand, he made his way up the drive, towards the sleeping front of Humble Bee House.

(viii)

It was eleven o'clock on the following morning when Bohun reached Humble Bee House once again, and rang the front door bell. The door was opened by Placket, who had no word to say to him. The Inspector was behind her in the hall.

"It's all over," he said. "Perhaps you'd better come up."

Norman and Rachel Mallet were sitting, upright, in chairs on either side of the empty hearth in their father's room. It was difficult, in the shadows, to realise that they were dead, so quietly and calmly they sat. Almost as if they had been carefully preserved, thought Bohun, and put under glass. The words formed an echo in his head.

"They took the same stuff as they gave the old man," said Franks. "Norman left a note—just to say that he was responsible for both his father and Morgan. Not much explanation. He says it was him, not his sister, but she knew about it—afterwards. I don't suppose we shall ever understand the whole of it now."

"On the contrary," said Bohun. "If you'll come out

in the garden I'll do my level best to explain it to you."

(ix)

"I wouldn't try to open it now, not unless you happen to be a skilled apiarist," said Bohun. "But inside that large central hive you'll find the dictaphone Mallet and Morgan bought for the consummation of their final stupendous joke."

"Joke?"

"So elaborate. So funny. So much in character. What's the best-known and oldest superstition about bees? That if there's a death in the house, they must be the first to be told about it. Can't you imagine it? After a week or ten days of preparation and preliminary fun, getting everyone in the mood for it, Morgan suddenly comes down last thing at night with the news that the master has had a second stroke and passed away. Chaos and confusion and the doctor to be sent for, and the lawyers to be telephoned. And in the middle of it all, Norman creeps down to the hive and whispers the news to the bees."

"I see," said Franks. "And the message is picked up on the dictaphone."

"That's right. To be preserved for ever and ever as the joke of a lifetime. I think it must have been due to take place that very evening. You can imagine Morgan's feelings when he went along to arrange for the culmination of the jest—*and found his master really dead.*"

Franks thought this out. He brushed off a bee which had settled on his coat.

"Later," said Bohun, "I don't suppose he thought of it at once, but later. Perhaps in the early hours of next morning, when things had settled down, it did just

occur to him to wonder. So he went off to the hive. The dictaphone had run down by that time, but he wound it back and listened in—and heard what I venture to think was one of the plainest and most singular confessions of murder which has ever been made—*a confession unmistakably identified by a slight stutter.*"

"You mean to say," said Franks, "that after he'd done the job Norman went off and told the bees all about it."

"Certainly," said Bohun. "You must never keep anything from the bees."

Another bee came past, and settled on Franks' sleeve. The Inspector looked at it in silence. The bee looked back, for a moment, impassively, then flew off.

"After that," went on Bohun, "Morgan re-hid the dictaphone in the safest place—back in the hive. The bees must have been a bit more active by then. I think that's when he got stung."

"He got stung a lot harder when he tried to blackmail Norman next morning," said Franks thoughtfully.

"Yes. Bad tactics to blackmail a desperate man."

"That's not entirely guesswork, I take it," Franks nodded towards the hive.

"I'm afraid not. I thought it all out last night. I've listened to the confession. You won't find *my* fingerprints on the dictaphone, because I wore gloves. But I'm prepared to bet you'll find Morgan's——"

"I see." The Inspector sat, swinging his legs. He seemed to be in difficulties over something. At last he said, without looking up, "I take it you told him. Sent him a note or something."

"Without prejudice to my having to deny it later," said Bohun, "—and since you haven't found it, I gather he must have destroyed it—yes, I did."

"I see," said Franks. "Best way out, really. I don't see much of this coming to light now. What exactly did you say to him."

Bohun got to his feet, and started down the drive with Inspector Franks beside him. They had reached the gate before he spoke.

"It is a couple of lines of verse. I've known them all my life—though I couldn't tell you, even now, who wrote them. They go like this:

'Money is honey, my little sonny
And a rich man's joke is always funny.' "

Behind them, Humble Bee House dozed in the morning sun.

The Tallest Man in the World

JANET GREEN

I GAVE up the idea of sleep and lay waiting for the dawn. Night showed black through a chink in the heavy hotel curtains. When the black became opaque, I slipped out of bed, crossed to the window, pulled back the curtains and watched the first light creep over the top of Edinburgh Castle and spread through the railings along Princes Street.

Then I saw it.

The tallest man in the world. Swinging from the lamp-post, its coat tails dancing in the wind; and in the distance Maxie running. He hardly seemed to touch the ground. He ran so fast.

I pulled trousers on over pyjamas, grabbed my top coat and raced down the well of the stairs. Round and round and out of the hotel.

I had to catch Maxie.

As I pelted across the tram-lines, my mind went back to the beginning. Open at the Empire, Birmingham, close at the Alhambra, Edinburgh, and in between a line of rich dates.

Maxie was flying in from Stockholm with the Dwarfs. I remembered the morning well. A clear bright day and my heart so light as I drove the big man's Rolls to the airport. The Indiam summer we had been so grateful for had tempted Papa Gaudin to keep his circus tenting four more weeks and Maxie was booked to open at the big Music Hall in Birming-

ham on the following night without his usual vacation.

I hoped he would like the supporting bill. The dates I knew would please him. All short journeys and top capacities. Maxie was never happy when the Dwarfs spent their Sundays in the car. He liked the little men to be in the new town for lunch so that they could see and be seen. The Dwarfs loved admiration and Maxie would laugh and encourage them to strut and posture for it wherever they went. He had loved the Dwarfs as if they were his children since he first met up with them just after the war finished, and was making his way from Vilna across war-wrecked Europe to Paris where Papa Gaudin was getting the Big Top out of moth balls.

At Dusseldorf they did not like Maxie's papers and flung him into a D.P. camp. For three days he tried to bang his way out, but could find nobody with the time to listen to him or the authority to help him. He has told me since that he never felt so frustrated and helpless in his life.

Coming from one more futile attempt to get some sense out of the overworked officials he walked beside the barbed wire looking out on the world that had abandoned him. Suddenly a thick and nauseating smell offended his nostrils and Maxie knew that he was near the latrines.

Then he saw them. Behind the stinking sheds. Six Dwarfs poised in the shape of a pyramid.

He stood in the noisome shadows and watched. The formation broke and the Dwarfs turned somersaults, hand springs and cart wheels, until they had placed themselves in the shape of a new pyramid, working all the time deftly and with precision. Maxie knew that he was in the presence of performers akin to himself and felt like the man lost in a strange country who suddenly hears his own language spoken. Not till the Dwarfs

stopped and left the place did Maxie's nostrils once again complain.

Each day for a week, he came back. The Dwarfs were always there; a bunch of bedraggled little men rehearsing with a blazing belief in their future. Maxie knew that as long as he was in that camp of forgotten people, the courage they showed would draw him like a magnet to their side.

On the eighth day Maxie saw an official attempt to move them away and heard the myopic one in the horn-rimmed spectacles whom the others called Spiro protest, saying in French that he had found the only place in the camp where they could rehearse their act without fear of disturbance or interruption. Nobody, the little man insisted, wanted to come to the corner behind the latrines. The harassed, overworked official, tired no doubt of endless questions and complaints in so many different languages, gave Spiro a push and the Dwarf sprawled on the ground; then the official felt himself lifted in the air by a massive hand that held him by the collar of his shirt, while a great blonde giant said in Polish, "They are performers. They must rehearse."

I imagined how, when Maxie released him, the official would go—quickly.

The Dwarfs saw the Giant pick up Spiro and, sitting him on his wide hand to bring him level with his face, look at him carefully, toss him high in the air, then catch him in his arms like a ball; and the Giant laughed. A deep, warm laugh that told the Dwarfs he was their ally.

Spiro saw the possibilities at once. He was an erudite little man and of course had read Swift. He told Maxie the story of Gulliver's Travels and together they worked out the details of a new act.

Maxie and the Dwarfs rehearsed all the hours of every day that it was light until they reached perfection; then they waited for a night without a moon and went.

Maxie found Papa Gaudin at Liège.

The old French showman has never tired of telling how they came, walking into the centre of the Big Top as he was rehearsing the Liberty horses. Maxie, with the Dwarfs on his shoulders, in his arms, all over him. Papa Gaudin embraced Maxie, who was the best and bravest Strong Man he knew, and the little men dropped to the ring where they waited. The Dwarfs knew they were safe. Spiro had told them that Maxie and they were one.

Papa Gaudin had learnt to trust his instinct. He knew quality when it faced him. Maxie and the Dwarfs went into the Circus that night. They were great then, but became greater during the succeeding months.

Maxie was the Showman of the outfit. Spiro the brains. I never saw that Dwarf without an armful of books. When he stood by himself and you shut your eyes to his size, he looked like a Professor in his well-worn Norfolk jacket. He had great knowledge and lost no opportunity to air it. I never trusted Spiro. I was repelled by him the first day we met. I resented the way he always behaved like a full-sized man. I like a Dwarf to stay a Dwarf.

As the airport came in sight, I drove past an advertisement hoarding. 'Roy's' comely blonde was there to tell me that her Employer's toothpaste could be relied upon to give me that winning smile. I cursed the lady for reminding me of Del Roy's trapeze, then quickly put on armour against the thought. I had not forgotten Spiro's ban on acrobats of any kind, but when

Frankie Diamond's Band fell out I saw the chance to snatch his magnificent line of dates. I was forced to take his bill as it stood and that included one trapeze. I told myself that Spiro would have to swallow Del Roy. That string of plum dates would surely sweeten the mouthful.

I had the photographers waiting when the plane touched down. Maxie came out on to the steps with the Dwarfs, who hardly had time to see the cameras before they climbed on to his shoulders and from there made a line-up on the fuselage. I hated to see them preen themselves, busily tightening the belts of their camel-hair coats and fingering the snapbrims of their felt hats. They dressed like Maxie right down to their pigskin gloves and smart buckskin shoes.

I admitted to myself that it was good window stuff with Maxie pretending he did not know where they had gone. The big blonde Giant made a fool of by the little tiny men. The movie cameras took it all in and I was grateful. No act is too big to turn its back on that kind of publicity.

When Maxie saw me he waved and a grin spread all over his face. I always found time to meet Maxie myself. In summer's sun, winter's frost, plane, train or boat, I was there; yet he never failed to look surprised and grateful because I had come.

I was happy that day as I walked quickly to greet him. To be with Maxie was like standing on a rock in front of the sea getting a good blow, when you had been stived up in a room for a year with no ventilation. I loved the look of Maxie. He was big and well-set in legs, body and arms. His golden hair grew in tight defiant curls close to his head. His eyes were grey and laughing. Maxie was full of good ways and had no evil in him. No, not any.

Together we got the Dwarfs through the Customs. The cameras followed all the way. Spiro gave his usual interview in impeccable English. He had a great line. The pocket acrobat who understood Saroyan. When Maxie thought that Spiro had said enough, he put his hand gently on the Dwarf's shoulder. Spiro stopped as soon as he felt the kindly pressure. He appeared to be devoted to Maxie, but I was never without the feeling that one day I would find his knife between those massive shoulder-blades.

I was wrong about Spiro. He did love Maxie. Simply and completely.

When we drove out of the airport, Maxie was at the wheel. I sat beside him and the Dwarfs were in the back. As we passed the advertisement hoarding, the blonde's teeth almost bit me. I thought of Del Roy and told Maxie at once that the bill I had taken over for him opened with a trapeze act. I felt Spiro's garlic-laden breath on the back of my neck and hastened to explain why it had been impossible to drop Del Roy. Maxie nodded satisfied, and I heard Spiro talking to the Dwarfs in some language that they all understood.

I was never without an uncanny feeling about those Dwarfs. They seemed like one entity, with Spiro as the Head and the others the Body. That was how I always thought of them. Spiro and the Body.

I smelt the garlic again and knew that Spiro was back with my neck. "As long as the act is up to standard, we're happy," he said.

I felt the garlic recede and was happy myself.

As soon as we left Uxbridge behind us, Maxie pulled the Rolls up under the shade of a tree and asked Spiro for the nuts. I never knew what was coming next with Maxie but was always prepared for anything.

He put his hand in his pocket and brought out

two little furry creatures, laying them on his blue silk handkerchief. I thought they were moles, till Maxie said softly, "Golden Hamsters. Aren't they pretty?"

Spiro dropped a small packet of nuts into Maxie's lap and the big man fed the tiny animals. They filled their little cheeks till they bulged and their bright eyes shone.

Maxie laughed and laughed. The Dwarfs delighted in his happiness.

When the Golden Hamsters bulged enough, Maxie put them back in his pocket. I turned and looked at Spiro.

"Maxie thought their cage was too small," he said.

"A nasty fine if you'd been caught smuggling those things through," I told Maxie.

"We'll get a cage for them in the next town," he smiled.

And we did.

After the Golden Hamsters were bedded down, Maxie began to sing a lewd French number that I always thought of as his song. He would render it in all sorts of languages just as the mood took him. The Dwarfs joined in. They knew the tune and the language did not matter to them. The effect was Babel.

The song saw us all the way to Birmingham. As we waited sometimes for the traffic-lights to change their colour, I could see how the Dwarfs amused the occupants of other cars. Only once a man and a woman watched gravely, and I knew that someone else felt as I did. Dwarfs should be quiet and never draw attention to themselves. The way a two-tongued man would hide his head.

I buried the thought and became glad that Maxie was having fun. I knew he would be in a high state of nerves by the time he opened on the following night.

It was always the same when he brought the act from the tent to the stage; and that year there had been no interim period.

It turned out that I was right. Maxie was so rattled that he stayed in his dressing-room till Spiro called him.

Spiro never trusted call boys. Come to that, Spiro never trusted anybody.

Once again Maxie and the Dwarfs were a smash. I watched the act from the back of the circle, and listening to the applause and laughter around me felt guilty because I alone seemed to find the Dwarfs repugnant. Spiders and cats do it to some people, I believe.

I never told Maxie how I felt about his children and would shake hands all round as if they were my oldest friends. My bonhomie was so convincing that they were very fond of me and liked to touch me. Imagine how it would feel to a man who hated spiders to have one stroke his cheek.

I know my business though. I give the customers what they want. It would be all the same to me if they plumped for a couple of talking pythons.

The *mise en scène* against which Maxie and the Dwarfs performed was enchanting; the Lilliputian Town Square, with Maxie towering above the roof-tops and the Dwarfs popping in and out of windows and doors. Two of the little men, both exactly alike, did an impossible tumbling act. Actually they were not even related. Born at opposite ends of Europe, I believe; but people loved the idea of twin dwarfs and would talk about it in the bar afterwards, making all sorts of indecent conjectures. Of course it was Spiro who saw to it that they both dyed their hair the same shade of fiery red.

The smallest Dwarf was a Spaniard. He played the trumpet, and at times I felt could have topped the bill

on his own. Spiro had him grow a Vandyke beard. Hair grows on their faces just the way it does on a full-sized man.

The one who wore the fez, a squat, swarthy Turk, running a little to fat, had the happy trick of throwing up sixteen balls at a time. They dropped into pockets all over him. On his shoulders, on his heels and on the inner sides of his sleeves. While the Turk stood quite still and did nothing. What a round of applause he won for himself; but I swear it was no bigger than the round that went to the thin, pale Dwarf from Lithuania who walked the slack wire and danced. He looked like something that came from under a mushroom, and Spiro gave him a deadline for his weight. He was not allowed to go an ounce over. Of course, ounces are pounds with those people. I used to feel sorry for the skinny little beggar when he was dieting. I once slipped him some good solid fudge, but I feel bound to admit that it was back in my brief-case the same night, and I knew that Spiro had put it there.

Spiro cracked gags and spun ropes that writhed like snakes in his small fat hands. He also recited poetry. His 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends' was quite a performance. It pulled the house in, even on a Saturday night.

That left Maxie who seemed to do nothing, but when you added the score it was everything.

The finale of their act was the old Gulliver routine. The one they worked out in the D.P. camp. It began with Spiro putting the lasso round Maxie; then the Body, giggling and chattering, caught him in a net and brought him to the ground. From a diminutive house, the Dwarfs brought multi-coloured staples, hammers, mallets, and tried to fix him to the stage. Suddenly there would be a great roll on the kettle drums, and

the big pinioned man would rise, taking the net with him and the Dwarfs with the net. Then Maxie started to turn. As he whirled faster and faster, the Dwarfs clung on to the ends of the net and the mirrors which each held in his hand caught the limes and made a dazzling pattern over the house. The effect was like that of a carousel at a fair, heightened by the specially orchestrated music which held the sound of a calliope. The whole picture was breathtaking and the customers cheered. I stood up and cheered with them.

I had plenty to cheer about. I was Maxie's agent. I collected the ten per cent.

Sometimes Maxie and the Dwarfs stayed in a hotel, sometimes in digs, but always together. In Birmingham they had wonderful rooms out at Edgbaston. We went back to a fantastic supper with everybody sitting in front of his favourite dish. The Dwarfs travelled with their own cushions which made us all level at the table. I used to think at times that Spiro seemed bigger than me. The Turk was particularly pleased that night for Maxie had found him some rose petal jam to go with his yoghourt. He ate it with enormous relish, till Spiro slapped his elbows off the table. Then he cried. Maxie took the Turk on to his knee, wiped the round black eyes with his own blue silk handkerchief, and to cheer him up coaxed a song out of the melancholy Dwarf.

The Turk climbed on to the top of a bookcase and sang Maxie's lewd French number. I listened to the sweet, high treble voice and mused upon the cruelty of the Eastern races.

When Maxie was sure that the Turk was happy again, we played poker. The stakes were astronomical and the losses paid with I.O.U.'s, which were meticulously carried forward to the next game. Inside that tight little circle, Maxie and the Dwarfs had their own fiscal

system. The real money was admirably looked after by Spiro. Their agreed intention was to retire one day to an orange farm in the South.

According to my calculations they could have bought three of those dream farms already, but I never went for that vision of the future. I knew that Maxie and the Dwarfs would go on trouping till the theatre fell in and the Big Top mouldered into dust. And that meant for ever.

My plan was to catch the midnight to London, but of course I went on the early morning train at six o'clock.

Maxie sent me upstairs to wash Spiro's cigar smoke out of my hair and I came down to find him waiting for me in the hall, looking as fresh as if he had woken up from eight hours solid sleep.

When he put his arm round my shoulders and said, "Your props are in the car," I felt the warmth of his smile enwrap me like a mantle.

As we slipped through the front door, first light was breaking over the smoke-scarred Birmingham suburb. Outside the gate, the Body jumped up and down behind Spiro, calling to Maxie and each other in half a dozen different lingos.

Spiro spoke my name, and I heard him say above the babel, "Look, a new act for you. The tallest man in the world."

I did as the Dwarf bade me, and looking over the stunted privet hedge saw my coat hanging on a lamp-post, with its arms stuck through the crossbar and my hat crowning the top of the lamp. In front of the light was a roughly-cut mask, through which still-burning bulbs marked the eyes and mouth.

I turned sharply to Maxie, who leant against the door laughing, intending to say, "This is beyond a

joke;" but when he took off his own big camel-hair coat and wrapped it warmly round me, saying, "Send it to me in a parcel, you'll miss a further train if we stay to pull down the tallest man in the world," my anger at the fate of a brand-new coat evaporated.

In the car I settled myself beside Maxie, while Spiro and the Body climbed in behind us. Through the window I saw a diffident morning breeze gently stir the tails of my coat as the tallest man in the world leered after us. We were off to a great accompaniment, for the noise we had made woke every barking dog in the neighbourhood.

I made the train as it moved out of the platform. Maxie and the Dwarfs kept pace with my carriage. They pranced round his legs waving their farewells, and I saw that Maxie was hugely delighted with the antics of his children.

I meant to pick Maxie up in a month's time at Nottingham but the week came and went and I could not get away. The few months before Christmas are always a busy time for me and that year I was having one hell of a job persuading my new comedy find to play Dame. Funny how young comics shy at the skirts. They have to be nursed to it though. A good Dame is worth a gold mine to a good agent.

About nine weeks went by before I saw Maxie again and during the whole time I never gave a thought to Del Roy.

The town was Liverpool. Maxie and the Dwarfs were ready at the airport with their usual boisterous welcome. I shook hands with the Body, pulled the ear of one, tweeked the nose of another and bowed to Spiro. I thought briefly before we all piled into the Rolls that his myopic eyes behind the horn-rimmed spectacles seemed preoccupied.

As Maxie swung the Rolls out of the airport, he looked at me affectionately and said, unnecessarily I thought, "You're in front tonight, of course?"

"Yes—there's an act I want to pick up at the Shakespeare first. But I'll be in for the second house."

"Well, don't run away afterwards. I've got a big surprise for you."

Maxie was smiling as he began to sing his song, but I was conscious at once that something was wrong. Out of place. Then I got it. He was singing alone. The Dwarfs were silent.

We all lunched together at the Adelphi Hotel. There was plenty to talk about. I had booked the act with Papa Gaudin in Paris for Christmas and started negotiations for a European tour in the spring. I was only mildly surprised when Maxie told me not to rush into anything.

"You never know what's going to turn up," he said, grinning across the table.

I saw Spiro watching him and a maggot of worry began to stir in my mind. Every now and then Maxie looked past us like a man searching for a familiar face. Suddenly he stood up and waved. I looked round. I was curious. Del Roy had come into the restaurant and was sitting alone at a table beneath the tall window. When I turned back, Spiro was looking at me. I raised my brows, but the Dwarf's expression remained blank and uninformative.

The hairs on the back of my neck began to tingle. Those hairs act like an alarm bell to me.

I was not surprised when Del Roy joined us for coffee, but astonished when Spiro rose at once, said he had a lot of reading to do, and went. The Body, of course, got up and followed.

As I watched the Dwarfs file out of the restaurant, I

put my hand to the back of my neck. The alarm bells were working overtime.

"I must talk to Maxie," I noted anxiously. "Those Dwarfs need cosseting. Quick."

I looked at him. Maxie's whole attention was riveted on Del Roy. I suppose my interest must have penetrated for he raised his head and invited me to drive to Chester. He accepted my answer without argument when I said I had a lot of sleep to catch up with, and they went for their drive without me.

As the Rolls spun away from the hotel, I heard Maxie's laugh cleanse the petrol-laden air, and saw the sudden flash of his blue silk handkerchief as he remembered me and waved good-bye.

Then I looked for Spiro.

He was not in the hotel. I went down to the theatre. The dressing-rooms were in darkness. I gathered my thoughts together and remembered all that reading he had to do. I knew at once where I would find Spiro.

When I reached the Public Library he was not there, but I did not anticipate a long wait. Spiro had said he wanted to read. I was sure the little man would show.

Soon I saw his hat just above the counter and heard the librarian's friendly greeting. Spiro had been coming to these places for years and knew the boys and girls by their Christian names. When he made his way towards the shelved marked 'Non-Fiction', I fell into step beside him. He did not look surprised to see me.

"What goes on?" I asked.

He put up his hand and took down a copy of the *Life of Napoleon.*

"The Corsican was five foot two," I said. "I'll tell you before you tell me."

Spiro smiled.

"I wish you liked me," he said. "I'm very attached to you."

For a moment I felt sorry for the agile mind imprisoned in the Dwarf's body, then he laughed and the smell of garlic was suddenly strong. My old dislike enveloped me, and I spoke brusquely. "When did Maxie first make union with Del Roy? What happened?"

The little man began to talk.

At first his voice was quiet and controlled, but by the time he came to the end of his account the Dwarf was sweating with anger and the smell of garlic was lost in the smell of Spiro.

On the Tuesday at Birmingham Spiro related how he watched the whole bill through and got Maxie down to the wings to see Del Roy at the start of the second house. Maxie agreed with him that it was a trite little act and not up to their standard. He asked Spiro to bring Del Roy to his dressing-room.

Spiro stopped suddenly and sighed.

"Go on," I said sharply.

Spiro looked at me coldly, then continued.

When Del Roy came to the dressing-room Spiro sat on the make-up bench and spoke for Maxie.

"Your act is not good enough," Spiro said. "We are dropping you from Monday night. You will be paid as long as the tour lasts."

'You'd have to do that,' I thought. 'Del Roy's contract is as watertight as yours,' then kicked myself for thinking like an agent. What was Del Roy to me?

Apparently Del Roy broke down and cried. Spiro said contemptuously that she looked as if she had been standing in the rain.

I knew exactly what he meant. The thin dark girl would have stood drooping in front of Maxie with her

tatty Japanese kimono swinging open to reveal arms and legs like peach sticks. I envisaged her using every bit of waif appeal she had, straightening her child's shoulders as she looked bravely up at him to ask what she could do to make her act good enough to go back in the bill.

"I showed her the door," Spiro said. "I knew what was coming next. There was a stray dog in Madrid, a barefoot boy in Rome, etcetera, etcetera."

He shrugged his shoulders wearily, took off his glasses, wiped them, and went on plaintively, "Almost every capital in Europe has a similar memory and some are not easy to clear up."

"What happened to the Golden Hamsters?" I asked.

"I found a home for them."

"Pity you can't find a home for Del Roy."

Anger showed violently behind Spiro's thick glasses and I went on quickly, "Where did it go from there?"

Spiro's narrative showed me vividly the picture of Del Roy's fragile figure hurrying along the corridor and up the stone dressing-room stairs to the fly floor, with Maxie watching in the open doorway behind her.

When he came in again, Maxie was pensive. Taking up a towel he quickly rubbed his smooth brown flesh till it shone, then attacked with a comb the tight yellow curls that I had seen beat him many times.

"We were too rough, Spiro," he said. "That little girl needs help."

I groaned.

Spiro stood with his back against the books and sighed.

From Birmingham they went to Manchester. Although her act was out on the Monday night, Del Roy travelled with the Company. She told the Stage Manager, a sentimental impressionable guy, that she

guessed she would stick around with the Crowd. She hadn't got a home, she couldn't play any dates the way her contract was, and her rooms were booked everywhere, so what the hell else was she to do? The Stage Manager found the opportunity to tell Maxie that he was sorry for the kid and asked if it was okay for her to use the stage sometimes to practise.

I looked at Spiro and saw that he had suddenly become excited. His small, fat hands were trembling and I thought I saw saliva on his pale red lips.

"Now, as you know," he said, his voice curiously high, "it's an understood thing that we have the stage every morning from eleven-thirty onwards."

I nodded. I knew Maxie's rule.

Spiro became very heated. "Well, on the Thursday, when we came on to the stage, Del Roy's trapeze was up and she was swinging from the bar. I moved to stop her, but Maxie held my arm."

The image of Maxie was clear to me standing on the side of the stage in his rehearsal kit. Tight black gabardine trousers, nothing above, and Spiro beside him reaching only to his waistline.

The Dwarf said Del Roy pointed to the stage clock. The hands were at eleven. The stage carpenter came through the pass door.

"Who's been mucking this clock around," he grumbled and put the hands forward to eleven-thirty.

"Del Roy, of course," I said. "What next?"

Spiro spat.

"The same," he answered, and told me that every morning after, Del Roy was on the stage when they arrived. Directly she saw Maxie, she would call the Props and begin to clear her trapeze. I knew without asking that she had persistently ignored the Dwarfs. The morning came when she fell from her top bar.

Spiro said the girl was a hell of a way up and would have broken her back if Maxie had not been there to catch her. She begged for time to climb again; said it was the only way that she could regain her nerve.

Maxie lifted her on to the rope and Del Roy swarmed rapidly up to swing herself into a sitting position on the top bar. Spiro told me bitterly that she looked like a skinny kid in her small silk briefs and vest.

'Like a child's liberty bodice,' I thought and wondered if Spiro knew of the curious desires that hide in the breast of a right sized man.

Del Roy swung herself through a few simple exercises then called suddenly, "Catch!"

Maxie looked up.

That time she fell deliberately and the Dwarfs saw him laugh before he caught and tossed her in the air like a ball. Then lowered her gently on to the stage.

Spiro stopped talking, took out his fine linen handkerchief with its elaborate monogram and wiped his hands. I was glad he did not want to touch me.

"There have been women before," I said, to comfort him.

"Not in the act," he answered.

I knew what Spiro meant.

"Now they rehearse every day."

I was jerked into fresh attention for the Dwarf's voice was so nearly a snarl.

"With what result?"

"We shall know tonight," he said crisply. "Maxie is going to show us all."

I whistled. I knew, if Maxie was going to lay it on, there was something to see.

A librarian came and told me to put out my cigarette. I stared at the fair young girl. I did not know I had lit it. Spiro was very upset. He said that they liked people

to observe the rules in places like the Public Library and added that he was so easily remembered because of his size. I felt that I had let him down and apologised.

"I'll wait for you outside," I said. "I want to smoke."

I also wanted to get away from Spiro's smell.

The Dwarf came and stood on the broad top step outside the Public Library. I was on two steps lower so that our faces were level. He passed me his morocco leather cigar-case and I helped myself. We lit the cigars slowly. Correctly. Spiro had a fine taste in cigars. They were worth the attention. When the Dwarf's cigar was well alight, he took it out of his mouth and slowly savoured the smoke.

"We have a good act," he said mildly. "We should not be happy if anything disturbed it."

Spiro smiled and went.

I watched the little man cross the square that marks Liverpool's civic centre to pass the near-black Ionic-pillared Town Hall, until he was lost in the crowds outside the Empire Theatre. Above his head I saw the week's bill and read the boldly-printed words, 'Maxie and the Dwarfs'. The title looked very permanent.

I walked towards the Mersey. Perhaps the wind on the top deck of the New Brighton ferry-boat would blow the odour of Spiro out of my hair. I did not want to think about him any more or make conjectures on the punishment he would decide to mete out to Del Roy.

Standing by the top rail of the ferry-boat I looked across the water and pretended that I was fascinated by the traffic of the grey-green Mersey. I watched the forest of striped funnels staring over the tops of the bond sheds lining the docks, the tugs snorting indignantly at the head of their charges, the clean bright paint of the Isle of Man steamer gleaming in the winter sun, and

the dark, dirty hulk of a merchantmen slowly steaming to the sea. The ferry-boat cut across the merchantman's wake and written clearly in yellow letters along the ship's stern I read the name, 'Neseta, Barcelona'.

The image of many different coloured rats racing across a hotel bedroom in Barcelona filled my mind. I stood quite still and allowed the memory to grow.

Three years before, Maxie and the Dwarfs had made a short spring tour of the main Spanish towns. From Barcelona I received a letter written by a buddy of mine who was in the bill, tipping me off that Sam Ellerman, the European end of a big American Film Agency, had been talking to Spiro. My friend did not know the outcome of their talks. On the principle that what is mine shall remain mine, I flew to Barcelona.

The city was empty of Sam. There was a wild rumour round the bars that he had been crased out of his hotel by a plague of rainbow-coloured rats, rats that only showed themselves to Sam. I knew Ellerman well. He suffered from our occupational diseases, ulcers. This meant that he was permanently on the wagon. I had an idea those rats were real.

I could not persuade Spiro to talk, although I stayed in Barcelona until the end of the week, when the Spanish tour finished and we all took train to Paris.

At the frontier, the French people made a big business of looking through the luggage. I happened to be next to Spiro and as they searched his cases saw several tins of luminous paint. I picked up one of them.

"Phosphorescent bills could be very effective," Spiro said blandly.

I laid the paint down again.

I had some chocolate in my pocket. Making it a promise, I enticed the thin, pale Dwarf into the corridor of the train. He told me in French, a language that is

almost my own, that Sam had made an offer for the Dwarfs to go to the coast—that means Hollywood in our parlance—to make a series of comedy two-reelers at the top pay packet. It was a long-term contract which did not include Maxie. Spiro had turned it down flat. I asked if Maxie knew why Sam had been in Barcelona and the thin, pale Dwarf smiled before he shook his head. I thought the smile was very gentle. For a Dwarf.

Sam did not understand loyalty. He just raised the ante. Then Spiro set the rats on him. I asked the pallid little man how it was done and learnt that the bearded Spaniard was in his home town in Barcelona where he had hordes of relatives, amongst them an uncle in the rat-catching trade.

I raised my hand. I could guess the rest. The Dwarf finished his chocolate, licked his fingers and went back to the compartment. He was a dirty eater and I was not surprised when Spiro brought him along immediately to the wash-place, shaking his head reprovingly at me as they rocked past.

I turned on the deck of the ferry-boat and put my face to the wind. Somehow I thought that it would take more than a troupe of coloured rats to frighten Del Roy. Years of experience had taught me that the small slight brunettes you meet in show business are the most deceiving. A big, plump singing blonde now—that's different.

I got back to the Liverpool side in time to catch the act at the Shakespeare and leave quickly, hoping that the two fellows whose fooling was not good enough would never hear that I had been in front.

I walked round to the Empire and met the first house coming out. As I went through the stage door, Del Roy passed me. I thought she smiled.

Maxie was in his dressing-room. The towel was extra busy and his golden brown skin shone like satin.

"Any good at the Shakespeare?" he asked.

I shrugged my disappointment.

"Cheer up," he smiled, "perhaps the next time you put your hand in the hat, you'll bring out the right number."

From the top of Maxie's wardrobe trunk, the theatre cat demanded his attention and with cunning understanding he stroked behind her ears. The cat purred and rubbed her head against his hand. Maxie was delighted.

"Take care," I said. "She can scratch as well as purr."

But Maxie shook his head. "They never scratch me," he laughed.

I fortified myself in the bar for the rest of the evening and went to the back of the circle to see Maxie close the bill, with the bell ringers at the back of my neck well drowned in good Scotch whisky.

When the last satisfied customer left the house, I made my way down to the empty stalls and saw that Maxie meant to do the thing in style. He had kept the full orchestra. The stage staff. The works.

Spiro and the Body filed into the second row of the stalls and I placed myself about halfway back. I was irritated when the theatre manager and his wife came to sit just behind me. A nice woman but she had been a performer herself and would lean forward to reminisce.

The conductor came into the pit, raised his baton and, with the down beat, led the orchestra into a rousing overture. The house lights dimmed and I saw the glow of Spiro's cigar. Soon it became the focal point from which I could not look away.

The curtain rose and I was able to shift my gaze.

Draped in black velvet tabs, the stage was completely blacked out except for a single spot shining on a silver bar twenty feet up. I realised that the borders had been raised as far as they would go and we were seeing a great deal more of the stage than is usually visible.

Maxie made his entrance from centre back. Picked up in a pin point spot he walked slowly towards the footlights, rolling a silver stick over his shoulders and into his arms. Then he tossed it into the air, caught it on one arm, threw it up again and caught it on the other. The thing was thick for a stick and gleamed like water in the moonlight.

The drums began to roll and a shaft of light shot across the stage. Maxie started to twirl round and round, holding the stick out straight from his body at arm's length. Each time the stick came into the shaft of light it flashed. Suddenly he released his hold and the stick shot across the stage, up the beam of light and abruptly stayed still as if it was suspended in mid-air. Slowly it began to rise, turning like a corkscrew, going higher and higher till it was level with the bar twenty feet up. Almost at once the stick was upright on the bar. The lights were clever, Del Roy must have put out her hands to catch the rope, which I took to be black, but I never saw her move. It had got me. I was impressed.

I saw the stick shimmering on the bar and Maxie below on the stage. As he moved into the beam of light he was smiling. His golden hair shone. The stick wavered on the bar, then balanced again. I looked up and down. Then up again. The drums stopped. Light poured suddenly from everywhere on to the silver stick.

"She's going to jump," I gasped, and did not know that I had spoken.

"She can't," said the manager's wife behind me. "There's no net."

The words were no sooner spoken than she screamed, for the silver stick had fallen from the bar and, falling, turned over and over.

Maxie was still smiling as he put out his arms and with no apparent effort caught the stick, then twirled it round his shoulders across and round again.

He was laughing when he brought the stick forward and bowed over it.

The orchestra went into a long chord and the curtains fell. I swear that all through, Del Roy never moved a limb. She *was* the silver stick.

Maxie came through the tabs and took the call. He had his hand on the top of the stick as if he was leaning on it, then suddenly took his hand away. Del Roy dropped her arms, moved her legs and was alive. They bowed to us and to each other as if the house was packed.

I stood up and shouted, "Well done," then saw the full glow of Spiro's cigar and knew that he was looking straight at me. I shrugged. How was I to know that Del Roy had so much to sell. Maxie and the Dwarfs had seemed the tops. Till then.

Maxie was waiting for me on the stage. I noted that even the stage-cloth was made of black velvet and the rope up which Del Roy had twisted, of black woven silk. The girl was scratching between her shoulder-blades without much effect, for she wore on her hands, black velvet gloves. Maxie turned her round and with accustomed familiarity completed the attention. I knew she was his mistress.

As I stood beside them, I saw that Del Roy's boy-like body was covered in fine black velvet fleshings, while a wide ribbon of silver sequins ran down the

centre of her body's back and front. On her head she wore a light spun-glass silver wig. Even standing so close to her and with the harsh pilot light shining above our heads, she bewitched me. I still saw her as the silver stick.

I could see that Maxie was bursting for my approbation. More than all the paying customers in the world, he wanted me, his ten-per-cent man, to say the act was good.

I told Maxie the truth. The act was unique.

As I finished, I smelt garlic and turned to face Spiro with the Body in a row behind him. On behalf of the Dwarfs he offered formal congratulations. Maxie shook hands with all his children then presented them to Del Roy. Spiro bowed and the thin, dark girl smiled.

As she rubbed her head lightly against Maxie's arm, I thought of the theatre cat. When I heard her say, "If they come up one by one, I'll give all the manikins a kiss," I looked at her hands to see if the claws were out. Pulling herself tight against Maxie, she added, "Make each feel a man for once."

Spiro stiffened and the bells at the back of my neck burst into a noisy carillon.

"We have no need of that act of civility," he said, bowed again and led the Body off the stage.

Del Roy was quite sure of Maxie; but I saw that he looked troubled and seemed about to reprove her. Then the conductor and the theatre manager's wife interrupted with their congratulations and the moment was lost.

I spoke on the telephone early next morning to London, with the result that Maxie and the Silver Stick were in the bill that night. They closed the first half, leaving Maxie and the Dwarfs their usual spot.

I was certain that the customers would love the new act but not quite prepared for the overwhelming reception it got. When the curtains fell on the broad Empire proscenium, there was absolute silence as if the breath had been knocked right out of their bellies. Then it broke. Round after round of applause, backed by whistles, shouts, the regular stamping of feet and here and there a programme thrown into the air.

Maxie and the Silver Stick were not just a smash. They were a riot.

I think it was the sex that did it. The act was packed with the desire they felt for each other and their fulfilment of it. I knew that a gold mine was in my grasp, but never thought of putting Del Roy under contract. We are an old-fashioned firm. My father believed that a handshake was more binding than a dozen signatures on a management contract and during the twenty years that I have run the business, I never once regretted the old man's ruling.

I stayed with Maxie for a couple more days, then had to hurry over to Leeds before returning to London. When I did get back to my office, the offers had begun to roll in and I was surprised at what a popular fellow I had become. It looked as if I would not need to buy a lunch for myself for months to come.

I decided to let things ride. There was no hurry. Maxie was booked with the Dwarfs in Paris for Christmas with Papa Gaudin. While he was there I would sit down and sift the offers; take the best that was going for the New Year.

I had only been back in London ten days when Spiro called me from Edinburgh. The time was three o'clock in the morning. I knew who it was because the charges were reversed. I started to tell him that I had been watching a cabaret, a new Hungarian girl I had

brought over, not bad—when Spiro interrupted urgently.

I listened to two sentences and knew I must catch the first train North.

Arriving in Edinburgh at about five o'clock on the afternoon of the following day, I saw Spiro on the platform. He looked pale and by the time we reached the Caledonian Hotel I felt pale.

The first person we saw as we entered the foyer was Sam Ellerman in a saxe-blue suit and an even more than usually revolting tie.

"Hello, there," he called.

There never was such an American American as Sam.

I greeted him politely but did not stay to talk. Spiro and I had a lot of conferring to do and I was anxious to get upstairs where we could do it in peace.

I let the Dwarf talk without a break. That time he had me so worried I did not smell the garlic.

Sam had come into town on the previous afternoon and made an offer between the houses. I waited for Spiro to tell me the gist of it. Sam wanted Maxie to do a coast to coast tour in America, starting immediately and ending at the New York State. Del Roy, determined to go, was urging Maxie to break his Christmas contract with Papa Gaudin.

I looked at Spiro and raised my brows.

"The offer does not include us," he told me quietly.

I felt cold. I knew the Silver Stick was good, but had never visualised Maxie without the Dwarfs. To me it would be like dropping half of himself if he went to the States and left them behind.

I said, "But Papa Gaudin. Maxie can't let him down."

"It is the woman," Spiro shrugged. "He is bemused."

I knew then that I should have turned my back on my father's memory and put them all under contract.

"I'll talk to Maxie," I said.

"Not till after the second house," Spiro ordered. "Maxie is always very nervous with the Stick. She is temperamental."

I believed him. I knew how tricky those skinny little tramps could be when they felt the first feather of success.

I saw Maxie at supper. The Dwarfs and Del Roy were all at the table with him.

Sam joined us. I was not sure why till he said, "I'm looking after this little lady's interests from now on." Then he patted Del Roy's kid's knee, and added generously, "Of course, Maxie's still your boy."

I watched him start to pick at his boiled fish and hoped his ulcer would up and burst.

When I looked at Maxie he flushed and stared over the waiter's head.

We got down to brass tacks quickly. I found that Del Roy had only succeeded in part. Maxie was determined to play Paris at Christmas for Papa Gaudin, but had agreed to go to the States afterwards. He beamed suddenly as if he had thought of something pleasant, looked at the Dwarfs and announced that it would be a wonderful holiday for them; then added that they would be paid just the same.

The big simpleton was so pleased and happy that I was sure he had no idea of the enormity of the insult he was heaping upon the Dwarfs. Nor had he realised what kind of a pay-off it was for Del Roy. But the woman remembered. I could almost hear her say, "Tit for tat, Mannikins." I looked at her as she sat still and smiling, and knew that she had engineered the whole circumstance.

"We are not willing for the act to be split," Spiro said quietly.

The ten eyes of the Body watched and waited. They did not understand the language that was being spoken, but Dwarfs are very susceptible to atmosphere and they knew that the air was full of dissension.

Sam moved impatiently in his seat and Maxie leant across the table to speak to Spiro.

"But I want to give you a holiday," he said earnestly. "You all deserve it. Afterwards we will be together again."

The Turk, who had been watching intently, suddenly asked a question in his shrill high voice. Spiro answered softly and the Turk burst into tears as he sobbed out the answer to the other Dwarfs and pointed one of his podgy fingers at Del Roy.

She looked at the Turk and laughed derisively.

The bearded Spaniard picked up a beaker of water and flung it hard into Del Roy's face.

Spiro swept the Body out of the restaurant immediately. The Turk was still crying and the others clustered round him all trying to touch him. I thought it was because they wanted to comfort him.

Maxie, bewildered and distressed, looked after the Dwarfs and allowed Sam to mop down the woman.

I just sat and listened to my alarm bells. Then I heard Maxie voicing excuses for the Dwarfs in the manner of a father explaining why his children like to make apple-pie beds.

Del Roy was silent.

We had attracted too much attention to remain in the restaurant, so Maxie and I followed Sam, who took Del Roy upstairs. All the way I heard him cosseting her, and thought if he called her 'Honey child', once more I would have to strike him from behind.

At the top of the stairs she turned and faced us where we stood a few steps below her. When she spoke, Del Roy's voice was very clear and quite loud.

The issue was a simple one.

It was either her or the Dwarfs from then on.

She finished, turned and went into a room a little way down the corridor. I heard the key click in the lock as she shut herself away from Maxie.

He followed to the top of the stairs, then from a plinth took a large bowl of flowers and smashed it hard upon the floor. Afterwards he strode down the wide sweep of stairs and out of the hotel. For the first time since the bearded Spaniard threw the water in Del Roy's face I saw that Maxie looked intensely angry.

Sam had turned a yellow colour and I knew the ulcer was complaining. He put his hand to his stomach and held it there. Like that he went along the corridor and into a room at the end.

As I turned to run after Maxie, I heard a movement and looked up to see the Dwarfs. All six of them. They were standing in a row on the landing above, peering through the balustrade. The Turk was still snivelling.

I raised my hands, then dropped them helplessly. Spiro copied the gesture and I felt a sudden camaraderie between myself and him.

"We shall keep the act together," he said softly. I knew he meant to comfort me.

Spiro led the Body up some more stairs and out of my sight. I heard the Turk's thin high voice wailing, then that too died away.

I shrugged and went to find Maxie.

Walking the hard old streets of Edinburgh, I felt cobble-stones under my feet and steps and tram-lines, and all the time brooding over me I was conscious of the dark hump of the Castle.

I never found Maxie.

Returning wearily to the hotel I observed that all the lights were out except for the half-lit chandelier above the hall. Passing slowly through the shadows I toiled up to my room.

Spiro was sitting on the bed.

'Heck,' I thought, 'haven't I earned my ten per cent tonight?'

"You can sleep now," he said. "I've fixed it. I found a solution."

The Dwarf looked very tired. I picked him up and stood him on the floor. He blinked at me from behind misty glasses, seemed about to say something more, then shook his head and went.

I knew why Spiro was sad; he was a realist and understood that the Dwarfs had to give up Maxie.

In spite of the little man's reassurances, sleep avoided me.

I went to Maxie's room once or twice but he had not returned. I passed Del Roy's room and saw that her door was slightly open. I guessed that she had left it that way to let Maxie know he was forgiven.

I gave up the idea of sleep and lay waiting for the dawn.

By the time I reached the lamp-post, Maxie was bringing down the tallest man in the world. The woman's head wobbled on her shoulders and the black silk rope dangled from her neck.

Maxie was weeping.

He turned and moved with even steps along deserted Princes Street, carrying Del Roy's body carefully in his arms. I kept up with his long strides, but Maxie did not look at me or speak.

At the police station above Waverley, he stopped and went in. I followed.

It was not until I sat quietly with Sam much, much later, that I was able to get things in their proper order. Sam helped me to talk. Without his kindness I should have gone crazy.

I was so sure when I followed Maxie along Edinburgh's famous street that he was crying for the Silver Stick, but Maxie's tears were for his children.

He stood in front of the desk in the police station and said quietly, "I did it. I killed her." Then like a temple offering he laid the body before the astonished police sergeant.

Del Roy looked thinner and smaller in death than she had in life.

Two policemen came and took Maxie away. They were sure he was mad.

I begged them not to let him speak to anyone till I found a lawyer; then I went straight back to Spiro.

The Dwarf was asleep. I shook him and woke him and told him what had happened.

He sat up, listened and gave me instructions. I obeyed at once, pulling the telephone towards me.

While I was locating the best lawyer in Edinburgh, Spiro dressed and went out of the room.

I fixed to meet the lawyer at the police station above Waverley, put down the receiver and turned.

The Dwarfs were standing in a row before me; all washed and dressed with the pigskin gloves on their hands, the buckskin shoes on their feet and the camel-hair coats tightly belted.

Spiro was pale and his skin glistened.

"They did it," he said, "I shall take them down to the police station and we shall confess."

I looked from one small face to the other. When I

came to the Turk he pouted and looked at his feet. I stood up and led them out of the hotel. They followed me like a crocodile of obedient children.

The Dwarfs confessed. They confessed in every conceivable language.

The police checked their story. At one point it looked as if it would stick. Till the night waiter at the hotel remembered seeing Spiro leave my room at the time the M.O. set for Del Roy's death. She was still warm when he examined the body and he was able to place the time within ten minutes.

That ruled out Spiro and nobody believed the Body could have acted without its Head.

A policeman on his beat saw Maxie outside the stage door of the theatre, gazing fixedly at the bill, three-quarters of an hour before Del Roy was hanged. They found the broken bowl outside her door, his blue silk handkerchief on the floor of her room, his finger-prints on the locket that hung round her neck and fact began to lend substance to Maxie's repeated statement that he alone was responsible for Del Roy's death.

I begged the lawyer to arrange for Spiro and me to see him.

Maxie was gentle, friendly and peaceful but we could not move him. Spiro pleaded and argued, got down on his podgy knees, but Maxie only raised and stood him on the table so that their faces were level, then reminded Spiro of his duty to the Body.

"Go back, my friend," he said, his big hand resting gently on Spiro's shoulder, "see that my children are safe. Do not desert them as I did. Remember they break what they do not understand, their crime was my sin because I forsook them."

They turned us away and I took Spiro back to the hotel.

He collapsed. I held him in my arms and forgot he was a dwarf.

I listened as he sobbed out his story of the night's happenings.

Spiro said that when he took the Dwarfs upstairs, he told them that they must let Maxie go without a struggle. He explained to the Body that it would only be for a little while. Maxie would grow tired of the woman as he had of the lame dog in Madrid, the barefoot boy in Rome and the Golden Hamsters in Birmingham. Then he would come back to them and all would be as it was before.

Spiro was right of course. Maxie would have come back to his children.

Spiro said over and over again that the Body had agreed with him or he would not have left them.

"The Turk as well?" I asked him.

Then Spiro beat his head with his two small fists. He had overlooked the Turk who was the most destructive child of all.

I imagined how the Turk would have chattered as he led the others to the theatre to drag down the woman's rope, then back to the hotel and up to her room to put it round her neck and pull it tight.

Spiro described how they carried Del Roy down the fire escape and made a ladder of their own bodies round the lamp-post, up which they pulled her to become the tallest man in the world.

Maxie had the best lawyer that Spiro could buy him. I hired a leading psychiatrist who fought a two-day battle with the prosecutor and won.

Maxie went to Broadmoor.

Once a year I see him and we talk about the orange farm where the Dwarfs are waiting.

When they let Maxie out, I shall take him South.

I hope he will be in time. Dwarfs do not make old bones.

I am sure of Spiro. His love will keep him alive.

I spent two weeks with them last year. I no longer feel any repugnance for the Dwarfs. They are heart-broken children and Spiro is my friend.

Remote Control

ALAN KENNINGTON

THE only light in the cellar off the Friederichstrasse was that of candles, the only sound that of planes droning above on their way to Gatow. Somebody knocked at the cellar door and everyone froze. The man nearest, the sentry, cried sharply *Wer da?* but this was only Karl, bringing with him a candle as entrance fee. He said, with a flat bitterness, "They fined me today, fifty marks for stepping over one of their damned white lines in this fog when they'd only painted it two hours before—I ask you, is that justice?"

Somebody else, a disembodied voice through the gloom, said, "We're in the wrong zone for justice. I'm not pro-British, I don't like their voices or their women. But from all accounts, from the chaps who've come back from there, it's the only country still south of Scandinavia where justice doesn't slip up."

Wolfgang stirred in his corner, shifting the chill from one shoulder to the other. He said, slowly, as if he were remembering something, "Even there, sometimes, it slips up——"

He went on, "It happened in my last six months before repatriation. I was working there on a farm with Hans Ehrbach—when I say a farm, it was one of those gentleman's places, all pedigree stock and no profits. Hans was a Berliner too, from Kottbus, single, younger than me, tall, dark and handsome, as the song says. He had a way with women, from the tales he told

us in camp before we moved to the farm, he seemed to have had that always. He thought a good deal of himself and besides that, he was choosey, he wanted always the cream off the milk. It was that in the end brought him down.

"This farm we were on was owned and run by a Major Anders. He was a big man, black hair, black moustache, black brows and a big white face, like a Frisian bull. He must have weighed all of 200 kilos, yet he wasn't gross, you understand, he could move fast enough when he chose. And strong, my word, he was strong, no one of us could match him at forking hay and I've seen him single-handed pull a car from a ditch. He'd got out early, I think he had some sort of pull, so there he was now with a farm and labour to work it. And a wife."

He turned his head. "Even Ernst would have given her full marks. Coralie was her name, and she was certainly something, blue-eyed and blonde, blonde as her husband was dark, as Hans was dark. She was younger by ten years or so than he was, but older than Hans. I guess from the first, looking back to it now, they were bound to come together somehow, she and Hans, the bait would be too much for her with his age and his looks. And he never could have passed up that sort of fruit, right under his nose and forbidden.

"So there you had it, the oldest set-up in the world, Joseph and Potiphar's wife, with the only twist to it now the fact that Hans, if he had wanted to, couldn't run out on her. We had the usual liberty, we could go down to the village and buy cigarettes, we could go to the one small Kino or the pub but we had to sleep in and we had to report. Hans had to be there when she wanted him and soon she was seeing to it that he wanted her.

"In his first year in the camp, he'd been taught hedging and ditching, so they gave him a job round a little wood two miles or so out from the farm. There was no supervision in those last months, no guard or anything like that. The war was over but we still had our patches, and if we had wanted to run, it isn't so easy to run off an island. And with repatriation a matter of months, why bother to get home any sooner? Specially as it was beginning to get through by then just what there was to come home to.

"So there was Hans in his wood, and this was thick country, not bare like the south, so that a man even with patches was hidden, and even a woman on horseback, once she cut down to the lanes. That was what she did. She had her regular ride and nobody at the farm seemed to realise she rode regularly by the wood.

"Hans told me about it. He told me, not because he trusted me in particular or because I was a friend of his, but because, being Hans, he had to tell someone and as he spoke next to no English, I was the only one there he could tell. He told me they met in the wood and made love, there in the thick undergrowth and the spring flowers. I wouldn't have dared to do that and I told him so. I liked her well enough in that way but if ever it had been me in the bluebells with her, I never could have enjoyed it, all the time I'd have been watching over my shoulder for him. There seemed—I don't know—something about him that didn't add up. Men of his size and type you expect to bluster and break things, to rage sometimes and curse but then pretty soon to be over that, and in a way you rather like them for it, as if there was something childish and straight about them. The Major wasn't like that, he was always cool and efficient, he never wasted a movement. Never, all the time I saw him, did he lose his temper

and he never once made a mistake, and if any of us made a mistake, he never cursed but only helped put it right with a smile. He'd a rather remarkable smile, a black-and-white smile, fixed, like an old photograph, that seemed to go past you as if really he wasn't thinking about you at all. As if, I used to fancy, he was thinking ahead about something different.

"I couldn't make out what he felt about her, or what she felt about him. I felt sure Hans wasn't her first straying and I felt the Major must know about Hans and her because he never missed anything, so that either he'd grown used to her ways and knew there was nothing he could do about that or else he just didn't care. As for what she thought of him, I think in a way she was proud of him, possessively proud, and certainly, so long as he let her go her own way, she was comfortable enough as she was. I don't think she was even frightened of him and if she was a little, that just gave an extra kick to her playing around. Or maybe she thought, because she and nobody else ever had seen him blow up, he never would do that with her.

"I was coming back late one night from the furthest barn when I saw him with another woman. There was nothing much about that, because she lived on the next estate, she was the widowed sister of the man who owned it. Her husband had been killed at Dunkirk so she didn't much like us K.G.s, but I'd noticed her because she was a good-looker herself, a redhead. When I saw them, they were walking side by side, talking low. They weren't holding hands or even looking at each other, but I got the idea he was fond of her, there was something about the way he leaned all that height of his over towards her that looked somehow protective. And then, while I stood in the shadows watching, I heard a sound like a sigh behind me and I turned and

looked and saw Coralie Anders watching them and I knew she had the same ideas about them as I'd had myself. I didn't feel then I should care much to be that redhead, because what Coralie wanted, she took, and what she didn't want, she got rid of. But she said nothing, only watched them till they strolled out of sight and then she went in. And after a while he came back and they met on the terrace outside the house, both as calm and quiet and *gemütlich* as if nothing had happened at all.

"I think first I had the feeling nothing would happen, that even if the Major really were sweet on the redhead and Coralie knew or guessed that, there was nothing for once she could do, not with Hans on the place. I didn't know her. All in a night now, she swung round completely, as if she never had loved or wanted anyone else but him. I'd thought she would be more subtle, but now she became so affectionate, it must have embarrassed him. He was her husband and she was keeping him, was her line, but somehow one knew it wasn't just jealousy, as if seeing him with another woman had relit an old fire. This was plain possessive with her, he was her property, legally and every way else, and nobody else was having him. And naturally she was smart enough to realise that if she wanted to go on holding him legally, she mustn't give him any handle to come back with at her. So the first result of all this was that Hans was out.

"It must have been three or four days or maybe a week before Hans realised finally for himself that those daily rides of hers to his wood weren't just postponed, they were over, for good. It was during the heat wave we had that June, the one fine spell in that English summer, and I think when she didn't come and still didn't come, something just snapped in Hans. At any

rate—and I heard all this later from him—he did a crazy thing; I suppose he felt certain by then that she'd only been playing with him so he didn't care much what he did or said or wrote or what happened to him, so long as he brought her down too. What he did was to write her a note in his schoolboy English, to tell her that unless she met him again in the wood, he'd get her somehow.

"She did meet him there. They found money on her and three hundred cigarettes, which looked as if she was hoping to buy him off, or at least to stall him along till his repatriation came through. He heard her horse's hooves coming up the lane and found himself trembling, half-wanting, half-hating her. She came to him smiling and said in her schoolgirl German, 'Be sensible, do. You're a nice enough boy but you know, or you ought to know, it never was more than something to do——'

"Something certainly snapped in him then, all he wanted then was to get his hands on her and in no loving way. He caught her and pulled her down and got his hands on her throat. He thought later she must have cried out, because, just as suddenly, it all seemed to clear. He seemed to realise then just what he was doing, that she was only one of a crowd, he'd had women before and he'd have them again and this one was no better than others he'd had, she wasn't even good-looking when she screamed with her face screwed-up. And certainly she wasn't worth swinging for.

"So that all of a sudden, as he watched her glare up at him, he felt good again, cured completely, and because he was cured and free, and because in a queer sort of way, he felt grateful to her, he smiled down at her, loosing his hands. So that he couldn't understand why she went on glaring and screaming, her face still

twisted—— Till he felt suddenly a great weight on his back, flattening him, pressing him down on to her, before everything seemed to go black."

"They gave him every chance, British justice, even to the formality of taking his fingerprints on her throat. He never had a chance, not with that note and the Major's evidence. I was in court when he gave evidence, he seemed to flow out and over the witness-box as simply and quietly he told his story. How he'd pulled Hans off, but too late, how he'd tried desperately to loosen his hands with all his own strength, but the man must have had the strength of a maniac. . . . There could only be one verdict: Hans to be hanged by the neck until he was dead.

"As I was a German and his friend, they let me see him on his last day. He told me then, in German, with them all staring blankly at us, what he'd not even bothered to tell the interpreter at the trial. How the Major, cool and efficient and economical in everything, had used someone else's hands on his wife."

Strange Journey

FRANK KING

THE Repertory Players were performing for the last time at The Opera House. They were a good combination, and had had a very successful season in Chelmston. It was not lack of support that had brought about the crisis, but the advent of Pantomime, starting rehearsals next week. With no alternative home, the Players were compelled to disband.

Celia Porter was not so concerned about this as some of her companions. For her, the night held an additional and very different importance. She was going out on approval, so to speak. Robert would be calling for her after the show, and taking her to spend a few days with his uncle. The old man, so she understood, was a tyrant, hard and bitter. But if he liked her, and thought her a suitable wife for his nephew, everything in the garden would be lovely. He'd all the money in the world—or most of it.

So Celia was feeling very excited as she charmed the audience in her most successful role—Helene Godfrey in *Deadlier Than the Male*. She knew that she would have to exert herself to the utmost during the next few days. Robert had warned her that his uncle was a hard nut to crack. But she'd captivated the good people of Chelmston. Why shouldn't she be equally successful with Walter Grandage?

At the end of the performance, there were many curtains, several bouquets, and a few regretful speeches from the stage. It was nearly eleven o'clock when Celia, flushed and radiant, reached her dressing-room.

Robert Duffy hoisted his long athletic figure from a chair, and grinned at her.

"Thought they were going to eat you," he commented.

"Wonderful, wasn't it? You didn't see the show?"

"Only just got here. The old boy decided that he wanted to talk business, so my plans were of no importance whatsoever. In his opinion it was a crazy notion coming to fetch you tonight, anyhow. Tomorrow would have done just as well."

"Oh, dear!" cried Celia. "You scare me. Suppose he doesn't—like me?"

"He will," asserted Robert. "He'll soon be eating out of your hand. But get a move on, darling, or he'll have taken himself off to bed before we get home."

Celia was soon ready for the journey. Robert Duffy picked up the suitcase which she had brought to the theatre with her, and accompanied her down to the stage door. Here he helped her to negotiate some enthusiastic fans, then led the way to a big American car parked just round the corner.

"Golly!" exclaimed Celia, sinking into the luxurious upholstery. "Someone left you a fortune?"

"It's the old boy's," explained Robert. "Brought it back with him on his last trip to the States."

"He can't be quite so bad as you make out if he's lent you his car to fetch me. Oh, I do hope I'll make a good impression."

"No doubt about that, sweetheart. But don't be hurt if he's rude to you. Sometimes I think he can't help it."

The powerful car ate up the thirty miles to London. Celia's excitement persisted, accompanied by a considerable degree of trepidation. Walter Grandage must be a queer customer; probably quite allergic to charm. All the same, she hoped he wouldn't have gone to bed.

She was keyed up now, ready to meet him. Postponement would merely make the ordeal worse.

It was soon after midnight when they arrived at the big house in Hamp tead. At first sight it appeared to be in darkness. But as the car rolled up the drive, Celia saw that one downstairs window at the side of the house was illuminated.

"Still in his study," commented Robert. "I'll get you two introduced before I put the car away."

He pulled up on the gravelled path just outside the lighted window, and helped Celia from the car.

"We're here, Uncle!" he called loudly. Leading her round to the front door, he unlocked this with his latch-key, and ushered her into the large, comfortably furnished lounge. "You look lovely," he added.

"I feel like running away," confessed Celia.

"Nonsense," said Robert. "He'll fall in love with you as soon as he sees you."

After they had waited a few minutes, a trace of surprise showed on his handsome features.

"Wonder what's delaying him. Perhaps he didn't hear us. I'll go and see."

He went out, leaving the door open. Celia heard him cross the hall to the corridor leading to the side of the house. Almost immediately he uttered a sharp exclamation, afterwards knocking loudly on a door. She heard this open, heard his startled cry.

"Good God! He's gassed himself!"

Then he shouted:

"Something wrong here, Celia. Ring 999. Get the police and a doctor. I must clear the poisonous stuff out of the room."

As Celia hurried to the telephone, she heard him open the study window.

In this same lounge some time later, Mr. Peter Trevor, immaculate as always, listened intently while Inspector Jamieson described how Walter Grandage's body had been found.

"Our men were here within two minutes," concluded Jamieson. "Duffy had opened the window, turned off the gas fire, and was just going to drag his uncle out of the gas-filled room."

"A leak somewhere?"

"No. Everything seems in order. The gas fire hadn't been lit—the elements were quite cold—but Duffy says the tap was turned on at full."

"Cause of death quite definite?"

"Oh, yes. The body has that rosy-pink colour you always get in coal-gas poisoning. The doctor says Grandage died about an hour before Duffy found him."

"No servants about?"

"No. There is a manservant called Orchard, but he's away for the week-end. Two women come in to help during the day, going home each night."

"So Grandage was alone in the house?" Peter frowned thoughtfully. "Normally, I suppose, both the nephew and the manservant would have been in. Looks rather like a suicide choosing his opportunity. Yet you sent for me. Why?"

"It's murder, Mr. Trevor."

"You seem very sure of it."

"So'll you be," growled Jamieson, "when you view the corpse."

"Very well," agreed Peter. "Let's see if it can tell us anything."

They crossed the hall, traversed a short corridor, and entered the study. This was a smallish room, with well-filled bookshelves, comfortable easy-chairs, and a flat-topped desk on which were a massive silver-bound

blotter, a stationery cabinet, and several standard books of reference. Though the french window stood wide open, the sickly smell of gas persisted.

The body of Walter Grandage, elderly, small and shrunken, had not been moved. It lay on its right side, on the thick hearthrug. Its knees were drawn up, as though Grandage had settled down there to sleep. After one glance at the livid bruise on the left cheek, Peter nodded.

"Certainly suggests murder, Jimmy. Your idea is that someone knocked him unconscious, then turned on the gas and left him here?"

"Must be something like that, mustn't it?"

"Any prints on the gas tap?"

"Only his own; and those made by the nephew when turning it off. But the murderer could have worn gloves. Or maybe used the old trick of turning the gas off at the meter, waiting until all in the pipes was burned away, then turning it on again."

"Yes. Well, you'd better tell me a little more about him while I look him over."

Peter carefully hitched up his trousers so that the knife-edged creases would not be spoiled, and knelt to examine the body. Jamieson flipped open his notebook.

"There's not much more to tell," he said. "Grandage was a wealthy man, head of a firm of exporters. The nephew, Robert Duffy, lived here with him, and has quite a good job in the same firm. So far as he knows, there are no other relatives. He's the next of kin and will inherit everything—unless Grandage has made other provisions in his will, which Duffy doesn't think likely."

"Perhaps as well he's such an excellent alibi," murmured Peter. After a while he added, "No doubt about

the facts here. Death due to carbon monoxide poisoning, and occurred within a few minutes of eleven o'clock last night. At that time Duffy was in Chelmston, eh?"

"Yes. His fiancée, Miss Porter, corroborates that. I've checked up on their combined statements, because Duffy admits quite freely that he and his uncle weren't on the best of terms. Quarrelled a lot. He's the obvious suspect. But the Chelmston police have made some hurried enquiries. Unquestionably Duffy reached the Opera House there about a quarter to eleven. So he couldn't have been here after ten at the latest—and that would mean some damned fast driving. Actually, he says he left about half-past nine. And, of course, he didn't get back until after twelve. Unless you can imagine him knocking his uncle unconscious and arranging the gassing before he left——"

"In that case Grandage would have died much earlier. No, Duffy's out of it, all right. Couldn't possibly be responsible—unless there are some facts we've overlooked. Wonder why his first thought was that his uncle had gassed himself. He must have seen the bruised face, surely?"

Jamieson snorted indignantly.

"And suppose he did? You can't expect a layman to realise its significance at such a moment."

Peter grinned. "Perhaps not. Has he any idea who the murderer may be?"

"Not a suspicion."

"Grandage was alone in the house when he left?"

"Yes. He says he intended setting off for Chelmston immediately after dinner. But his uncle wanted to talk over some business with him, so he had to wait."

"Doors and windows all right?"

"I see what you're getting at, Mr. Trevor. And I agree. They're all securely fastened. There's no sign

of any burglar getting in. Which means that Grandage must have admitted the murderer himself."

"And therefore was killed by someone well known to him? It doesn't necessarily follow, Jimmy. A complete stranger may have rung the bell, and struck him as soon as he opened the door. But I'll admit that doesn't sound altogether convincing, either."

"Not a bit. Seems to me that someone knew he'd be alone in the house. Can't be just a coincidence that this happened when both the manservant and the nephew were away."

Peter looked up from his examination, nodding thoughtfully.

"Sounds reasonable enough. And if you're right, the murderer must have been in fairly close touch with the family. What about the manservant—Orchard? Have you been able to check on him?"

"He's where he's supposed to be—in Eastbourne. But for all I know, he may have sneaked up to Town this evening, killed Grandage, and gone back."

"It's a curious method of murder, of course. To knock your victim unconscious and gas him doesn't sound like a premeditated action. Suggests something more in the nature of a sudden impulse. I can't understand this curious posture, either. I'm pretty sure Grandage couldn't have fallen like that—curled up, just as though he were asleep. And I can't believe he was lying here asleep when the murderer struck him. You know, Jimmy, I've an idea this isn't going to be an easy case."

"So have I," grunted Jamieson. "That's why I asked for you to be called in."

"Flattering. But sometimes I wish you'd give me something straightforward for a change." Peter leaned over the body again. "Now let's see if we can decide

what caused this bruise. Perhaps the familiar blunt instrument. Or even—— Hey! Wait a minute!" A trace of excitement sounded in his voice. "I don't think this is—— Will you get my bag?"

Jamieson hurried out for the bag. Taking an instrument case from it, Peter selected a small scalpel, and with this made a tiny incision in the livid bruise on the dead man's cheek. He examined the cut closely through a powerful lens. Then he rose to his feet and moved slowly about the room, softly whistling something which was barely recognisable as 'Annie Laurie'.

"That isn't a bruise, Jimmy," he said after a while. "It's due to hypostasis."

"Tells me quite a lot, Mr. Trevor."

"Sorry. Perhaps you'll understand better if I call it post-mortem staining. It's a condition found in all bodies, no matter what the cause of death, and is due simply and solely to gravity. Blood, like any other liquid, tries to find its lowest level. It gravitates into the lowest parts of the body, according to the position in which this is lying, and there causes a discoloration of the skin, which looks exactly like a bruise, and has often been mistaken for one."

"But surely our surgeon should have known——"

"He was probably misled by the fact that hypostasis does not as a rule occur until some considerable time after death, perhaps eight or ten hours. Besides, for obvious reasons, you don't expect to see it in the face. But it can occur almost immediately after death, and in this case there's no doubt about the condition. That incision I made proves it conclusively. There's no extravasation of blood into the tissues. Therefore there was no bruising before death."

"Gosh! Then it *was* suicide, after all?"

"No. It's still murder. Even more definitely murder. Unless—— Are you quite sure the body hasn't been moved?"

"It's exactly as Duffy found it."

"You did say that, when your men arrived, he was trying to drag it out of the room."

"He was just starting to. The french window was wide open, so they came straight to it. They saw him stooping to lift the body, and called out, asking him not to interfere with anything."

"Queer. A lot can be done in two minutes. It wouldn't take him thirty seconds to open the window and turn off the gas. What was he doing for the rest of the time? I wonder if he did turn the body over for any reason?"

"He says he didn't touch it at all. Why so concerned about it, Mr. Trevor?"

Peter felt in a pocket, and snapped his fingers irritably. Recognising the gesture, Jamieson gave him a cigarette and a light.

"Thanks, Jimmy. I am worried about this. Because if Duffy didn't move the body—turn it right over, in fact—someone else did. Post-mortem staining isn't brought about in a matter of minutes. Grandage died at eleven o'clock. To produce that hypostasis on his left cheek, he must have been lying on his left side for the best part of an hour. Yet he was found lying on his right, soon after twelve. Who turned him over—and why?"

"You mean he must have been moved within a very short time of Duffy finding him?"

"I mean exactly that."

"But you're getting us into a worse mess than ever, Mr. Trevor. If he wasn't knocked unconscious, how did anyone manage to gas him?"

"I didn't say he wasn't unconscious, Jimmy. I merely said he wasn't knocked out by a blow in the face. Let's make absolutely certain about this hypostasis. It should be on other parts of his body. Help me to get some of his clothes off."

There was marked post-mortem staining on different parts of the left side of the body. After gazing at this verification of his diagnosis for a while, Peter's dark eyes suddenly glinted with excitement.

"Lift him up, please," he asked.

Surprised, Jamieson stooped and gathered Grandage's frail figure into his arms. As he straightened with his burden, Peter stopped him.

"See how you're holding him, Jimmy. Your left arm under his shoulders, your right under his knees; his body sagging between. If he'd been a heavier man, you'd have held him differently. Perhaps hoisted him on to your shoulder. Now put him down again, on his right side as before. Be very careful not to make any noise."

Jamieson obeyed, laying his burden on the carpet. Peter smiled at his puzzled face.

"See what you've done? Reproduced the exact position—curled up as though asleep. Just because of the way you were carrying him."

"I get you, Mr. Trevor. He was carried here from some other part of the house? Perhaps because of the gas fire?"

"Something like that. Let's take it a step further. Seems to me there are two possibilities. Either he was carried in here just before eleven, gassed, and left lying on that rug until twelve, when someone, presumably the murderer, turned him on to his other side. Or he was gassed somewhere else, left lying on his left side until twelve, then carried in here and put on to his

right side just in time for Robert Duffy to find him. Which sounds the more likely?"

"You ask the darnedest questions, Mr. Trevor. What do you think?"

"Well, if the tap of that gas fire had been turned on for over an hour, wouldn't you expect the whole house to reek of gas? Yet Duffy and Miss Porter didn't smell it when they came in. So I incline to the second alternative. Especially as I can't imagine any reason why the murderer should want to turn the body over."

"But why should anyone want to make us believe that Grandage died in this room, if he died somewhere else?"

"Now you're asking the question," smiled Peter. "And I can't answer it. Are there any other gas fires in the house?"

"Never thought of looking."

"Might be worth checking. I'll carry on here."

Scratching his grizzled head, Jamieson hurried from the room. Peter knelt down again and continued his examination of the body. Before long he found something that set him whistling, a soft almost tuneless whistle which bore a remote resemblance to 'Loch Lomond'. He was still studying his find when Jamieson returned.

"There's a gas fire in every bedroom, Mr. Trevor."

"Eh?"

"I say there's—— Have you got something?"

"I found this in Grandage's mouth, Jimmy. Caught between his teeth." Peter held up a pair of forceps from which hung a tiny thread. "What do you make of it?"

"Looks like a bit of wool."

"It is wool. Red wool. Bright red wool."

"Oh!" Jamieson's disappointment was evident in his

voice. "That completely solves our problem, I suppose?"

"I think it does," agreed Peter. "Got a cigarette? Thanks. Let's have a look at Grandage's bedroom."

He rose to his feet, carefully stowed the thread away in an envelope, then accompanied Jamieson upstairs. In Grandage's large comfortable room, the Inspector pointed to the gas fire.

"There you are, Mr. Trevor. Want the tap going over for prints?"

"No, don't trouble. Just help me to look for a pill-box or a small bottle."

"What's in it?"

"Probable nothing. But it should be somewhere around."

Thoroughly mystified now, Jamieson set to work. He soon found an empty pill-box in the drawer of the bedside table, and read the label:

" 'One tablet to be taken at night as directed.' This what you want?"

"Yes, thanks." Peter dropped the box into his pocket. "Now let's have a spot of fresh air and gather our scattered wits together."

He led the way downstairs, through the study, and out by the french window to the gravelled path where the big American car was standing, with a police car just behind it. Here he paced about in the darkness for a while, softly whistling something which this time was quite unrecognisable.

He halted eventually beside the big car and tried the handle of the boot. It was locked.

"Ignition key left inside?" he asked.

"No. But I can get it from Duffy if——"

"Never mind. Lend me your torch."

Jamieson handed over his torch, then stared in amazement as Peter dropped on to the path, wriggled

under the back of the car, and inspected it with the aid of the light. His surprise was not diminished when the no longer immaculate Mr. Trevor reappeared, brushed down his clothes and said:

"All in order, Jimmy. Shall we have a word with Miss Porter?"

In the lounge, Celia Porter sat on the settee with Robert Duffy and looked rather frightened. Peter studied her thoughtfully.

"Did you know," he asked abruptly, "that you'd a third passenger on your journey from Chelmston?"

Her lovely eyes opened wide. "I—I don't understand."

"Of course you don't. I'm afraid this is going to be a big shock to you, Miss Porter. And yet I feel that I ought to congratulate you. You're too nice a girl to be —married to a murderer."

There was a startled silence. Then Robert Duffy laughed.

"What nonsense is this?"

"I'll explain. Soon after dinner you gave your uncle a big overdose of sleeping tablets——"

"It's a lie!" cried Duffy. "If you've found anything suggesting that he had sleeping tablets, he took them himself."

"That's what I thought you'd say." Peter's smile was cold. "It's a good story, and we can't disprove it. But we can prove that he didn't carry out the rest of the proceedings himself."

Celia's eyes were now blazing indignantly.

"You can't be serious, Mr. Trevor!" she cried. "Robert was with me when his uncle died."

"That's quite true, my dear. He murdered Walter Grandage in your presence—but without your know-

ledge. It was a very cunningly contrived scheme. It would have been completely successful except for a bit of unexpected bad luck."

Peter's voice hardened again.

"He knew that exhaust gas from a car produces exactly the same post-mortem appearances as coal-gas. In each case the toxic agent is carbon monoxide, which gives a characteristic rosy-pink coloration to the skin. When his uncle was deeply unconscious from the sleeping tablets, he put the limp, frail figure into the spacious boot of the car. Before leaving the house, he turned on the tap of the gas fire in the study a little. Not too much—because he didn't want you to smell the gas when you came in."

"You can't have any proof of all this, Mr. Trevor," murmured Celia shakily.

"You'll be satisfied before I've finished, Miss Porter. Let me go on, please. He'd made some slight alterations to his uncle's car—led a tube from the exhaust pipe into the boot, with a cute little valve operated from the driving-seat by a length of wire. See the idea? As soon as you set off back from Chelmston, he opened the valve, which very quickly created a strong concentration of exhaust gas in the boot, thus ensuring that Walter Grandage died about eleven o'clock.

"When you got here, he pretended to discover the tragedy, being careful to suggest that his uncle had gassed himself. While you were telephoning for the police, he got the body from the boot of the car, conveniently parked just outside the study window, and carried it in. He had to switch off the light, of course, while doing this, in case any chance passer-by caught a glimpse of him, so he didn't realise that he'd changed the position of the body. He must have got a terrible shock when he switched on again and saw what looked

like a bruise on the dead man's face, strongly suggesting murder rather than suicide. But there was nothing he could do about it. He hadn't time, even, to turn the body over to hide the bruise before the police arrived."

Celia Porter turned to Robert Duffy in agonised appeal.

"You didn't do it, Robert? Say you didn't!"

"Of course I didn't! I never heard such a wild accusation. Without an atom of proof to——"

"There's a rug in the boot of the car, isn't there?" interrupted Peter. "A travelling rug with some bright red in its pattern."

"Well? What of it?"

"You'll find it difficult to explain to a jury how a thread of this bright red wool got into your uncle's mouth. And, of course, there's the ingenious little gadget you fitted to his car. Because of the unexpected turn in events, you've had no opportunity to remove it yet. Besides that, we shall be able to prove that your uncle was killed by exhaust gas, and not coal-gas."

Jamieson looked troubled. "Is that a fact, Mr. Trevor?"

"Oh, yes. Don't you remember the celebrated Sydney Fox case. Fox was hanged because the air passages in his victim's lungs showed none of the tiny deposits of soot always found in people who have been suffocated by smoke. Duffy will be hanged because we shall find tiny deposits of the oil which is always present in exhaust gas." Peter felt in a pocket and snapped his fingers irritably. "Give me a cigarette, Jimmy. Thanks. Now take him away, while I try to persuade Miss Porter that she's really a very lucky girl."

He Got What She Wanted

NIGEL MORLAND

I

THE years have passed at times like beads told by ancient fumbling fingers; in other moods I have seen those years race, tearing out of my uncertain grasp, leaving me with a sense of time laughing at me.

But Time in its flight has no pity, nor have the skies mercy. I have tried to flee my twin devils only to see them running at my side, pacing me with nonchalant disinterest, neither mocking nor savage, just there. They stay, impalpable, inflexible, constant, yet beyond reach as a man's shadow.

And when did it actually start? The first frail tendons of misery wrapped round me unseen tentacles as tenuous as the first shoots of a malignant tumour which remains unknown . . . and triumphant on the day the surgeon's knife finds it and is defeated by it. It grew round me like that, sheltering in my sense of shame, overwhelming me until I could do nothing, bringing with it a resurgent second devil, one I thought I had lost. A monstrous towering pair, the hunger and the thirst, the unfilled, the unslaked . . .

But autobiography is apt to run amok with a writer's sense of drama, for I am, indeed, a writer by trade: were I on my death-bed, as well I might be, my pen would record the moments as the self-experimental researcher notes his symptoms. Writing is surely nothing but the tape recorder of its creator. He might

hide, with thin furtiveness, behind the hedge of fiction, yet, nevertheless, all writing is merely the writer playing to the audience of himself, abject before the rowdy despot of the subconscious mind.

I write because I must, write as Dr. Jekyll might have written when Mr. Hyde was absent. But I have no doubts of my closeness to my Mr. Hyde. I am both a human being and the devil's cherished, indissolvably one in an unending oneness.

When I look round and see my friends, such as they are, and when I think on them I am lost in a sense of wonder. They see me as I see myself now in the mirror on the far side of this table at which I am writing.

Ordinary? Indeed so. A slightly built man of medium height; slim, rather feminine hands, small feet and good bones. My face is simply that, the epitome of John Doe: quiet blue eyes, dark hair and what the nice-minded call pleasing features. A man, a passable, civilised, modest man of perhaps forty. Obviously cleanly; obviously of good parentage and of good education. Those who attend to my wants call me 'sir' and I treat them fairly; head waiters are polite to me.

My friends see all that in me, too. "Frank Damon?" so they would answer an enquiry, "old Frank? Lord, yes, a nice chap. Quiet, you know. Good company over a drink and a useful man at bridge and tennis. Writes, you know"—here that inevitable apologetic English chuckle—"and good at political stuff. Thrillers as well." Here the amused smiles. "Never read the things myself, of course! But they must be good. He makes money."

Old Frank, and I look in the mirror at old Frank, one invisible devil on each shoulder.

I always did like political science, but thrillers pay,

not that I really need it. I use a pseudonym, John Laker Considine (carefully chosen, that—Carr, Chandler Charteris, Cheyney, Christie; and Considine fits neatly in the middle on the shelves, picking up some reflected glory). You know my characters? Dr. Malobo? The Red Aces of Justice? Raffety of Scotland Yard? Colourful stuff, wild, and perhaps melodramatic, but impervious to my devils.

John Laker Considine and his bright jackets. Poor old shadow! Piling up wildernesses of escapism for those who would flee themselves. And behind this veritable escapist stands his *alter ego*, the substantial presence of Frank Damon, old Frank the nice chap who would give everything in his world, unto the clothes he wears, to become John Laker Considine, safe, simple, uninvolved John Laker Considine who dwells in his one-dimensioned, pseudonymous world.

Out of the windows of my gracious study I can look across my small garden, backing on this house my family left me, and becoming Hyde Park. On the other side, the front of the house, is the rear of Knightsbridge. A noble and valuable house, big for a solitary man, and one that I love.

However, I digress. With my ballpoint in my hand and my thoughts arrayed, my greater morbidities shrink back though they do not leave me entirely, even with the spring brightness of Hyde Park to delight my eyes.

Brightness in Nature in no way detracts from my devils. The one, the older one, I endured and continue to endure though its continuation shocked me; the second devil came on me a year after Dunkirk, over a decade ago; it was the more awful of the pair. Fortunately it was in London in the chaos of war with bombs turning civic life to ruin. I was able to disappear, for

money I had and I was able to buy oblivion and secrecy.

That second devil came on me so stealthily that I did not believe it at first; then I shrank back affrighted, crushed, nauseated. I had to bear it alone—and it is only now, thinking on it all, that I understand how the leper must feel.

My mother and father died before the Second World War broke out; they left me this house in which I have returned to live again, and they left me money. Writing I took up as a release from myself, and as a means to power without visibility—a purely morbid passion!

Yet I always require anonymity. That is easily found in London. The world and the people I knew before Dunkirk went with those same tides of war which washed smooth the sands of my acquaintance, enabling me to start again.

So, too, went Mary Damon. The world had no need to recall her at all, for those same tides had washed her away as well. But this little man must come enquiring. A troublesome little man, seemingly as harmless as a fly on the wall: brownish—hair, skin, eyes—and slight. Not young, and sadly dressed, with fraying cuff edges and a dusty old hat, a man you could see with a cake and a glass of milk in a cheap restaurant, a man no one would ever notice, wholly a human zero except, perhaps, in his name—Arthur George Zink.

He was here last week, enquiring so mildly, blinking at me from behind his thick spectacles, affable, self-effacing, desiring not to trouble me, enquiring for Mary Damon, apologising for bothering me, gentle, kindly Arthur George Zink—as weakly persistent as a dripping tap, so *damnably, politely, endlessly persistent*!

I see the tremendous juggernaut of bureaucracy hauled by regiments of Arthur George Zinks, little men

and even little women at their eternal writing, making their entries, adding their sums, putting one and one together, until a total must emerge. And asking questions, unavoidable questions, persistently, persistently. . . .

2

The inspector's glare was ferocious.

"You think that, sir?" He put both hands on the desk, leaning forward to tower over the plump amiability of Superintendent Leeds. "It's the fifth one—don't forget it."

Leeds beamed at Detective-Inspector Chater. Because they had become friends when they met as uniformed probationers on their two basic years, they usually forgot rank when alone.

"You're letting the thing infuriate you, Tom——"

Chater threw up his arms and sat down, placated by the use of his Christian name.

"Naturally I am a trifle distrait." He glared. "Five kidnappings and five kids returned without a hair of their dear little heads being harmed, without a single mother screaming blue murder after the first knowledge of the thing——" Chater jerked a thumb to indicate all New Scotland Yard. "The pundits must be delighted."

"They are indeed." Leeds flapped his hands at the lean black Highland fury of his friend. "But I'm your super, old boy. Won't the mothers say a thing? You can tell me."

"Tush! Compounding, dammit! And do they care?" Chater sniffed. "Ach! And how can I move? I can't even prove they've paid or how much or where. Women!"

"Kids all right, I s'pose?"

"I've got my methods in finding out. Aye, they're bonny. Clean, well-fed, cared for, happy as Larry. I've known a few kidnappings but none like this."

"And why won't the mothers talk? What's behind it? Can't you get one of the Yanks to come across and help us? They're used to the snatch racket."

Leeds grimaced.

"Now, Tom. We're in a cleft stick, you know it. Nobody's complained, at least the complaints've been withdrawn as soon as made. We can't prove anything, or even how the money passed——"

"There's such a thing as compounding——"

"Be quiet, Tom. It'd be a hellish charge to get across in court. Can you see the Attorney-General's face if he was asked to support a charge against a mother for compounding when her child had been kidnapped and she wanted it back?" Leeds leaned forward. "Tom, get the bastard, will you? Apart from everything else, it's a dirty business."

Chater snorted irately.

3

But this is not work. I have the newest adventure of Dr. Malobar to finish, a matter of ten thousand words, yet I find essays at autobiography so fascinating, the ancient principle of confession being food for the soul!

It may be. It is also a minor antidote to devils. I am feeling clearer in mind, more comfortable. There is the Malobar manuscript to fetch. I am old-fashioned in that I write in longhand, for my mind constructs and perfects the next sentence while I am still writing.

The folder of manuscript lives in the built-in cupboard in the bedroom, for no sensible reason.

When I opened the door and bent to pick up the folder, a wave of nostalgia swept over me. Not for months had it happened. Perhaps the spring air intensified the deep scent of gardenia, that well-remembered scent.

All carefully preserved, hanging there, the outer world of Mary Damon . . . there was the coral taffeta with the full skirt, the brown check suit—a costly article—bought in Bond Street, and the ivory satin cloak that had gone to all the best theatres in London. There was the fur coat—Persian lamb, a most expensive thing, costly, too, but I saw it as hateful, for only the other day I read of what happens to those small lambs . . . I touched garment after garment, each fashioned article had a memory a decade old, a story, an appeal, and each reached out to me, disturbing me, hurting—me, a man, a writer of bloodthirsty tales, John Laker Considine, no less!

But the requested *Danegeld* was paid in the coinage of uneasy recollection which memory demanded. I was a fool, a thrice damned fool to keep these things here, a stupid danger in their way, yet I could do nothing, could not get rid of them any more than could a mother throw away the relics of a dead child.

Then it began worrying me again, that probing little man, that subtle and insinuating Zink. A wholly absurd name which comes dangerously close to Mary . . . God forbid that he can disinter her, yet in a most shocking sense, he can do that if he comes too close, and then?

These morbid thoughts did not help me. I thrust the pen at the paper, back again at my table, and thought of Dr. Malobar, 'The tall man with the dramatic green eyes seemed to tower over the whole room, a growing domination of terror.' There it stopped, a hiatus which remained.

It was no use trying; I could not write. That brownish little man of the frayed cuffs and the dusty hat would not leave my mind. Zink was such an absurd name, such a futile sound, yet it had the power to appal.

I cannot bear the thought of my security, my routine, my world and my appetites being disturbed. I cannot bear what Zink might do.

All my ease had gone now, the morbidities which can possess me have returned and there is a feeling as if a hand has caught in my entrails and is twisting, a horrid feeling of impending doom.

I have been upstairs and all seems well there. The stairs are gaunt ones, still decorated by the family's choice of an ugly floral paper. The upper rooms are old-fashioned and solid; they were used by our maids but now they, like the rest of the house, are empty save. the narrow room with bars where Mrs. Croucher, who was our cook, slept for twenty years.

The boy did not wake when I went in there. He seemed comfortable. I arranged his covers, tested his napkin but it did not need changing—I pride myself on a genius in these things which few men possess.

His brown eyes studied me when he momentarily awoke. His sudden whimpers were quietened; at ten months infants are easily soothed if expertly handled. This is a placid boy, with the chubby, well-rounded aspect of the naturally-fed child who has been capably weaned. Nadia Tarlyon, being a film star and a beautiful woman, probably employs good help: I shall be telephoning her shortly about her son.

The question of Zink requires pondering. If Zink will leave me alone, no harm will be done, but I doubt it. He will not stop. His sort, narrowly persistent despite every obstacle, will continue with the single-mindedness of a bigot on a mission.

One cannot *kill* such a silly little man; to do so would only precipitate a deluge of Zinks, for his kind are as uncounted and numberless as ants, instantly subservient to the great god which rules them, the file of the case. What civil servant moves without a record to guide him?

The problem is, what I can say. Zink cannot be fobbed off. I recall every word of his last visit. "But where *is* Mary Damon, sir?" "She went abroad." "Indeed. May I have the dates and place, please?" You see? Or it could be: "She went away and never came back, Mr. Zink." "I *am* sorry, sir. Of course you went to the police and took steps . . ." God! Even this is denied, "She was killed in the blitz, Mr. Zink. Not a trace of her left." And he would say, "Aow, how sad. But if you will just give me particulars I will be able to verify it, or perhaps trace some witness, and then I can close my files." You see? Zink, Zink, Zink. He cannot be dodged or avoided. In his gentle, steady way he will uproot everything and would he keep quiet, then? I am not prepared to endure it.

4

Superintendent Leeds bounced his plumpness on the office chair as if he had been bitten.

"Nadia Tar*lyon*?"

Chater's lank blackness was involved in a twist of purely Highland cynicism.

"The beat, beat, beat of ten million adolescent hearts. Aye, and the mother, when she isn't emoting at five thousand a week, of a kid of ten months. Julius Richard Stullux."

"Stullux?"

Chater made a wide gesture, leaning on the desk.

"Nadia was careless or something. That's her real name, Mavis Stullux, originally of Penter's Rents, Bankside, Bristol. I'm the only one who knows it. She's not married but the kid won't care, not if he gets all her money, and she's a saving body."

"Tom, will you talk *sense*?"

"Yes, sir." Chater beamed. "Maggie Benning, who used to be in the typists' pool here, remember?"

"Maggie—yes. Little fair girl, wasn't she? Left for a better job, though she always wanted to be a police-woman, God love the kid."

"Right. Left when Tarlyon wanted a secretary and picked her at the interview. Maggie likes the job and kept quiet when the Tarlyon kid vanished yesterday. But Tarlyon was rung by the kidnapper an hour ago, and Maggie's too good an ex-police stenographer to forget the rules."

Leeds jerked to his feet.

"A real break, Tom? No!"

"Aye. Our Maggie hasn't forgotten her old mates. She listened in on the extension when Tarlyon took the call. What she heard cheated her out of ten years' growth."

"Come on."

"Nadia Tarlyon baulked at the terms, then accepted. This bastard picks them well, picks them beautifully. The ones who'll pay his price. His psychology is like something out of a book; he judges their capacity to pay to the last fraction. Ach!" Chater looked disgusted.

"Well, let's get busy. We'll be able to catch him."

"Mebbe. I don't know." Chater leaned over the desk again and whispered with the Celt's raw sense of drama.

Leeds's eyes became more and more round. When he said, "Ker-*ist*, I don't believe it!" Chater nodded solemnly.

5

Reading over what I wrote yesterday, it would seem that I was uneasy. A form of prescience, I am sure. Now the child has been given back to the mother, I can relax. For a time it was worrying.

What made me telephone again and change the venue I shall never know. She answered herself because the secretary was out, and that was fortunate as I do not like others to hear my voice. I was right, for, driving past her block when this Tarlyon woman was with me, I saw several men who looked like officers entering her doorway, arriving for the rendezvous I had altered.

Oh, it was all so drab. I wonder by what miracle of science the motion picture industry can give glamour and appeal to its shadows so that they entice men when, verily, they are reticent surburbanites with the inhibitions of the seventies?

But of that enough. There remains Arthur George Zink, a *third* devil.

Of course I might say to him enquire and be damned; even Zink gives up if confronted by a blank wall, but he might probe at the bank and discover the facts of the transfer of all *her* money to *me*, and that—how foolish!—by one cheque. Then my roots might be dug at—no, I could not stand it.

A most iniquitous dilemma. Perhaps it would be better if I curbed my almost pathological fastidiousness and became content with humbler foods; obviously, I am taking the most incredible chances.

It has all been so startling since I concluded the last paragraph that I am writing from memory, verbatim; my memory is excellent for detail.

In the excitement of returning little Julius Richard, with its results, I forgot to renew my supply of cigarettes. There are a dozen shops almost outside my door, and I walked out, forgetting my current habit of initial reconnaissance through the hall window.

And there he was, right on my doorstep with his hand raised to the knocker. A vague smile hovered on his mulish face, more dust than ever sat on his awful old hat, and there was a fat manilla folder, tied with red tape, under one arm.

"Ah, Mr. Damon? I've tried to get you several times of late, sir. This *is* lucky. My chief's quite peeved, you might say."

In the manner of defiant rabbits or obstinate sheep—do I strain simile too far?—Zink was a creature at bay, an odious, bogusly jovial creature wagging a cautionary finger in mock stricture.

"Sorry, Mr. Zink." I hid my fury excellently. "I must go. Urgent business. Another day?"

"I must *insist*, Mr. Damon, truly I must." He touched his plump folder. "After all, it is Crown business, sir." He waved to the busy road behind him as if he were acting a part; I was not sure if he was indicating the battered old motor-cycle at the kerb—Zink on a motor-cycle!—until he added, "Yes, Crown business, sir. All behind me, you know—the Government, the people, the armed forces. Yes, yes, and even the Queen herself. Remarkable, isn't it, all in this folder? All saying, 'Assist our trusty servant, Arthur George Zink.' " He giggled and looked at me imploringly, hoping I was diverted by this awful facetiousness.

There was nothing for it but the lounge. There he

disposed himself, put down his hat and gloves, and considered me, patting his folder before opening it.

"Here we are, Mr. Damon. Now . . ." He dug out papers, droned on from interminable notes, reading from forgotten records and matters overlooked by the intermission of war, but now disinterred because the Government wanted money and the great hunt was on, one which makes the 'Mounties' mere amateurs. H.M's Inspector of Taxes are leaving no stone unturned.

"I quite understand." I said it for something to say. "All in the records?"

"Here." Zink patted his file, beaming. "Aow indeed, the Mary Damon matter from beginning to end. If I lost it . . . why, we'd never be able to do a thing!" He giggled.

"Indeed? But I have said *I* will give you a cheque for all the owings, Mr. Zink, estimated, assessed or otherwise. I pay my own income tax, don't I?"

"Right on the nail, sir. Most commendable. But it isn't that simple, you see. You've paid it all most proper, but you acquired a large sum of money, sudden like. You see, a cheque for all the owings isn't quite what I want.

"What we do want is details from the lady herself as to her income over the war years, and, come to that, details of your own earnings *prior* to the war. You see how it is? It's not that we think we're being cheated, sir." He gave a most jolly chuckle. "It's records. We simply *must* have the returns properly completed."

"Even though I've offered to pay——"

"Very good of you, too." Zink peered at me. The awareness in his brown eyes shocked me. "I mean to say, you couldn't rightly pay without an assessment on the lady, and the lady can't be assessed without her personal returns. I'll have to talk to her, or her bank,

sir." He got out some scratch paper. "Now, sir, you can give me certain facts. I know I'm pestering you now all of a sudden, like, but this file got shifted to Colwyn Bay and lost for the duration, you might say. Now it's come to light again, of course I'm hard at it." He beamed at me expectantly, kindly, his pen poised ready.

I rose and began to talk, and though I have often written it, I never before realised the tenuous hold of humanity on life. Arthur George Zink did not even look up from his writing as I hit him with the small footstool, the very stool I used to sit on when Mother read to me.

I snatched up the papers first. They were all there, right back to the days long, long before the war. The incredible organisation of these people!

The anthracite stove in the kitchen wiped out the whole Damon file in very few minutes, leaving ash I broke with the poker.

That left Zink. I stared at him, crumpled, shabby, and faintly obscene. I thought death possessed dignity. Zink had only a grubby, shoddy pettiness, like a badly-stuffed dummy, his skin patchy and his beard manifest under the surface. The lounge made him look cheap and silly, a sorry middle-class intruder. It struck me that class distinctions do not cease with death. Corpses have no social graces.

The disposal of Zink was easier than I imagined. Back now at my table, writing all this down, I am amazed at the general simplicity.

I am not expert in the disposal of bodies, but common sense is a guide. I chose the coal cellar where, in spite of fictional advices to the contrary, people do not go probing.

My hair protected with a handkerchief, an old pair of

pyjamas over my clothes, and I was ready. I shifted a lot of coal to one side, raised two of the cracked flagstones and dug Zink's grave in the sour-crushed earth. I buried him well down, with his belongings, and replaced the flagstones. A handful of dust from my vacuum cleaner was next, this being sprinkled over and into the crevices round the replaced stones. The completion of this process I left to the coal which I put back in its original resting place. The quantity of soil I had left over was disposed in the toilet.

There was only one more step. Being spring and past the time for fires, it was still possible a vigilant searcher —if he ever appeared!—might look at my coal with a penetrating eye. To make everything safe I plugged home my electric fan in the kitchen, ran the fan to the length of its flex, that is to the coal cellar door. I threw a few handfuls of vacuum cleaner dust in the air in front of the whirling fan and closed the cellar door at last, certain that Zink was safe for ever.

My working pyjamas I burnt in the anthracite stove and I was sitting down at peace with the world, safe at last, and writing this record when the front door was suddenly assaulted with a loud and solemn knocking, so arresting and unexpected that my hand continued writing automatically, until I convinced my conscience that it was not Zink, returned! I went downstairs.

6

Chater's sniff was loud as it was contemptuous.

"The unluckiest criminal in history."

"Damon?" Leeds's cherubic face was deeply troubled. "Unique. Making the mothers pay—um—that is, setting the kidnap ransoms as nights of—um—pleasure."

"Ah." Chater's lankiness was surmounted by a head eloquent of a sort of sardonic madness: he did not even speak rudely to this mealy-mouthed Sassenach who could not call a spade a spade. "Picked them beautiful and had them instead of cash. Never been thought of before, and they paid like lambs. Ach, women!"

"But . . ." Leeds, for once, was out of his depth.

"He picked the lonely mothers, the good-lookers. Says he was so fastidious that he wanted only the hand-picked few, and got them the way he did." Chater suddenly had a plum in his mouth. "Played on their maternal instincts, their vanity, and the plain goat in them: more women have it than you'd suspect, especially the headliners."

"I'm lost." Leeds was shaking a mournful head. "The fellow's mad, going after all—in a woman you'd call it nymphomania, I suppose. I don't know what it's called in men."

Chater stared at him and went to the door of the office, returning with a little man stout as Leeds was stout, but more serious and weighty in his manner: that he was an expert of something was obvious even before he spoke.

"Utterly extraordinary," he began without waiting to be introduced. "Most perfect example of the adreno-genital syndrome——"

"Professor Tcherpalein, St. Martha's Hospital, Department of Morbid Anatomy," Chater murmured with sardonic unctuousness.

"Eh?" The professor paused and stared. "Quite, quite. Perfect example, you know. Had a long talk to him in the cell at . . . ?" He stared blindly at Chater who bowed, winked slyly at Leeds, and said, "Cannon Row Police Station, sir; this is New Scotland Yard."

"Really?" Tcherpalein glanced round as if he

doubted it. "If you say so." He beamed at Leeds whom he thought of as somebody of great importance who would, obviously, permit him more time with the fascinating specimen in Cannon Row. "You look puzzled, sir. A layman, but, I am sure, a most intelligent one?" Tcherpalein's chuckle was a guttural Teutonic sound. "Very simple, you see. Adrenogenital syndrome, sir—that is, the syndrome might be defined as the condition where secondary male sex characters appear in the female: the primary and secondary feminine characters and their functions become retrogressed.

"In brief, sir, endocrine disturbances—I should deal with the question of tumours and cortical hyperplasia if I am to elucidate——"

"It means," Chater said with the smooth efficiency of a UNO translator at work, "a perfectly innocent and seemingly healthy female who turns into a full-blown male with all the trimmings. Aye, Professor?"

"Well . . . yes . . ." Tcherpalein wriggled.

Leeds grew red, prodding the book in front of him.

"Yes; I've read this journal of Damon's. It's weird."

"Oh, no." Tcherpalein eyed the book greedily. "I recommend you to the excellent American, Harvey Cushing, or to Broster, Bullock, Sequeria—it is a well-documented condition. The symptom is not new. . . ." His eyes gleamed and he climbed on an invisible rostrum. "It is, gentlemen, Nature in a retrograde evolutionary spiral, if my paradox may be forgiven me, moving towards an intersex type. That is something in our immediate future, I assure you, a distinct third sex. Now Damon . . ."

Leeds listened blindly until he caught at reality in the explanation of the secret and discreet operation Damon had undergone which completed the transition

from Mary Damon to Frank Damon, the devil that had descended inexplicably on a helpless woman.

"Amazing," Tcherpalein continued happily. "Subject was a nymphomaniac in the female state. This was transmitted without change to the male Damon, proving, what we did not know before—that though superficial tastes change, a basic mania remains unchanged. Yet our patient is feminine in his expert ability in caring for, and quietening his small charges, and of no sex or both in an acquired fastidiousness which he admits impelled him to . . ." He was still chattering when Chater eased him from the office and told him to go back to Cannon Row, which he did like a child with complete licence over an unguarded candy store.

Leeds exhaled vastly.

"Holy God, and just *what* is the Director of Public Prosecutions going to do with that in open court?" He leaned forward. "Tom, is Damon sane?"

"Ah." Chater became smug. "It will be six of one and half a dozen of the other when the psychiatrists get at the poor loon." He made a Highland noise like 'Im'phm'. "Changed his sex from a her to a him, starting this kidnapping racket to . . . Havers! I'm not surprised at the fits and handspins in that diary about Zink, probing to find Mary Damon. Horrific, isn't it? Ironic, eh? He didn't want to be shown up to the world, but wouldn't Zink have to do that? I mean, just what does an income tax inspector do when a client who was a woman becomes a man? He'd talk his fool head off, suspecting cunning fraud. The I.T. people always do."

"But, murder?"

"All right, then he's insane." Chater shrugged; true to his race he was taking the incredible in his stride

while Leeds was floundering along. "Nothing but blazing irony to the very end.

"Thaper, of the uniform division, watched Zink park his motor-cycle outside Damon's house, in a prohibited area, and Constable Thaper waited. Oh, aye, he waited. People could've been coshed before his eyes," Chater added with savage bitterness, "but Thaper had his eye on a traffic offender, waiting for Arthur George Zink to reclaim his crummy old bike."

"He watched for two hours," Leeds interrupted hotly.

"And why not?" Chater was seraphic. "Wasn't Zink parked in a forbidden zone? That's a *real* capture for a thief taker, you ken?" His eyes were glass chips. "Thaper was going to pinch a *motorist*, but the sinner never turned up so Thaper banged on Damon's door.

"And Damon, poor soul, nearly fell down dead at the sight of the constable, and blew his top for the frightened woman at heart he was, and practically led the way to Zink snugged down under the coal where we'd never have thought of looking, so well was it done.

"Tcherpalein can make a note in his little book that a woman can become a man, adrenogenital syndrome and all, but blind terror at the sight of the unexpected and dominating male under authority reacts on the fundamentally female instinct in only one way. It was Constable Thaper's lucky day."

Leeds mentally surveyed the whole muddled ugly tale and made that helpless gesture of a man in real life confronted with a nightmare.

Death at the Wicket

BERNARD NEWMAN

THERE was certainly plenty of evidence.

Country house cricket is in danger of becoming extinct, so I had gladly accepted Noxon's invitation. Not that I am a star performer. A country house cricket eleven usually consists of three or four good players, a couple of promising youngsters, three or four people who were once cricketers, and a couple who never were and never would be. I came into the third category, but young Faulkner was emphatically in the first. He was a fast bowler of class, and only the accident of birth in a Minor County had kept him from the public eye. He had played plenty of games for the M.C.C., and had done well; though at Lord's they whispered stories of his queer temper.

Papa Pontivy, once a famous French spy catcher, went down to Malmeston with me. He was not in the least interested in cricket, and within an hour had shocked the company by calling the umpire a referee, and by a comment that Faulkner must be a good bowler, since he hit the bat every time.

This was during a practice game. Over tea, Noxon talked over his strategy for the first match. Faulkner would be his shock bowler: there was a slow left-hander for the other end. After that, he had as changes a selection of has-beens and would-bes.

I am not quite certain how the words 'body line' came into the conversation. The phrase was always more dramatic than accurate, but since the unfortunate

controversy in Australia it has been dropped—the phrase only, not the method of attack. Many bowlers, when they talk of 'leg theory' and 'pad play', are really discussing Larwood's method.

Pontivy pricked up his ears when 'body line' was mentioned, and a dozen people tried to explain it to him, quite unsuccessfully.

"You may see a bit of it on Wednesday, M. Pontivy," said young Faulkner—rather grimly, I thought. "We're playing Malmeston—and Torris will be there."

I knew that there was bad blood between him and Torris. I confess that I never liked Torris myself. He assiduously cultivated a local reputation as a cricketer, and actually he knew the rules—and dodges—of the game backwards. As captain of the Malmeston Cricket Club he was successful, but very unpopular with his opponents; not because of his success, but because he was no sportsman—he never took a risk, and would insist always on his pound of flesh. There was a famous occasion years ago when Malmeston were facing a score of 260, and had nine men out for 85—and then Torris claimed bad light, and got it.

He used to make a lot of runs, but was not a pretty bat. I never saw a man use his pads more, not even in professional cricket before the new rule. He never played an innings without at least three l.b.w. appeals. He survived all but the last, and unkind rumour said quite a lot about umpires. A country house party is not unlike a school in its atmosphere, and schoolboys' opinions on visiting umpires are notorious. The Malmeston regular umpire was one of Torris's own servants —half the team depended on him for a livelihood, for that matter. It was noted, so exasperated bowlers declared, that Torris was never l.b.w. unless the

opponents' umpire had to give the decision, and Torris was always careful when facing his end.

There had been a scene between Faulkner and Torris the previous season, I remembered: Faulkner could stand punishment, but Torris's pad play made him wild. He promptly packed his leg-field, and served up some real body-line stuff! It wasn't dangerous, for Faulkner was accurate, but it got Torris rattled. And at last he appealed to the umpire!

Unfortunately for him, the umpire wasn't his own man, but a retired Indian officer, Colonel Coffin.

"What?" barked Coffin. "Appeal disallowed! This is cricket, sir, not a test match!"

Old Coffin's unconsciously-coined epigram became almost a classic, and unkind people used to whisper "This is cricket, not a test match!" when they wanted to get Torris wild. Strangely enough, Faulkner himself got unexpectedly ratty when the incident was mentioned. Although he had scored, he hated Torris the more.

But although we all agreed with Faulkner, we tried to calm him down.

"I don't care what you say," Faulkner almost shouted, "but if he tries that pad-stuff, then I give him leg-theory."

"Oh, cut it out, old chap," Taunton protested—another Grade I player. "It'll kill cricket."

"Never heard of in my time," old Knight put in—a grand old tryer, still good for five or six on a perfect wicket. "In my day we used to play the game."

"Play the game!" Faulkner howled. "But Torris . . ."

"Torris doesn't know how to play the game—never did." This from Bingham, the local doctor. I didn't like him: a good cricketer, but utterly selfish—played for himself first and his side second. When he wasn't

batting, he always wanted to bowl. He fancied himself as a fast bowler, but was very erratic—not in the same class as Faulkner. "Nevertheless, I should go steady on the body-line and bumper business, Faulkner. Torris isn't so young as he was, you know—can't get out of the way."

"He's quick enough to stick his pads in front," Faulkner retorted. And he went off into a long defence of body-line—all the old arguments dragged out again, till we were sick of it. I have only mentioned the discussion at length because it was such vital evidence against Faulkner.

Bingham continued to advise caution. I doubted if he were thinking of Torris's welfare! He wasn't Torris's doctor: on the contrary, he disliked him as freely as anybody. Only last winter, so old Knight told me, there had been ugly rumours about Torris and Bingham's wife. Evidently the potential scandal had blown over, for there had been no divorce.

We were to play Malmeston the following Wednesday. Noxon, our host, had fixed up the match in spite of the universal dislike of Torris, for Malmeston were a good side, and had a fine pitch in the middle of a glorious old village green. Noxon had fixed up a full week's cricket for his house party, which was to be assisted by one or two local residents like Bingham. I was quite pleased with my own moderate performances, but Pontivy would have been bored to exasperation but for the lucky accident that the Chief Constable of the county was among the guests. The two men talked shop very contentedly throughout the games.

The house party arrived a few minutes late at Malmeston, but Bingham was already there to represent us: I noticed Torris out in the middle of the green, inspecting the wicket. He won the toss and decided to bat.

I would have witnessed the affair at Malmeston in any case, but chance gave me a front seat for the drama. Early in Malmeston's innings our wicket-keeper knocked up his right thumb rather badly, and had to take off the gloves. Noxon, our skipper, handed them to me.

"Slip the pads on, will you, Newman?" he said.

"But, damn it, Noxon," I protested, "I haven't kept wicket for twenty years!"

"No, but you used to. Stop 'em—that'll do. We don't expect fancy work."

Faulkner was bowling well, getting real pace out of the hard pitch. But I could see that Torris was getting on his nerves. So well positioned behind the stumps, I could now appreciate the irritation of Torris's pad play. Twice Faulkner broke through his guard, and once appealed confidently for l.b.w. But Torris's man was at the other end. I saw Faulkner bite his lip, and guessed what was coming.

I wondered if Noxon would interfere, but Faulkner was his star player, and he himself no more than a keen rabbit. Faulkner set his field deliberately—five men on the leg side. I was a bit anxious—for myself: body-line bowling is no picnic for the wicket-keeper. Torris looked round at the new field in some anxiety—pad-players aren't too fond of being hit.

He certainly got what was coming for him. Faulkner's second ball caught him a nasty blow just below the heart. Play was held up for a minute, and I saw Dr. Bingham look meaningly at Faulkner. But Faulkner was past looks, and had no mercy. Torris stopped the fifth ball of the over on the point of his knee, and almost jumped clear of the ground at its sudden sting—a fast ball on the knee can be *very* painful. He swung his leg to ease it, and took his stance for the final ball.

It was never played. Just as Faulkner began his long run, I noticed that Torris shuddered; a few seconds later—just as Faulkner delivered the ball—the bat fell from Torris's hands. The ball crashed into the undefended wicket; I saw Torris staggering forward, clutching at his chest; a moment later he sank helplessly to the ground.

I ran to his side, and fumbled with my clumsy gloves as he writhed on the crease, his hands pressed towards his heart. But now Dr. Bingham, from mid-off, was kneeling beside Torris. He called out to Knight to bring his bag from his car, and then forced a few drops of red liquid down Torris's throat. At this stage I noticed that Pontivy was on the field, bending over Torris.

"I fear that he is dead," the old man said quietly to the doctor.

"I'm afraid so," Bingham agreed.

The match was of course abandoned at once. I was more than concerned. Sergeant Wilkins, the local policeman, was in the Malmeston team, and I saw him talking to the Chief Constable.

I pulled Noxon on one side. The old chap was naturally tremendously upset. We knew that Torris's death was an accident—Faulkner had never meant to kill him. But that is merely the difference between manslaughter and murder. I did wonder, in fact, if a charge of murder might not be preferred. Manslaughter depends upon involuntary and unplanned conditions, accidents through negligence, and the like. But Faulkner, days before, had planned to bowl body-line at Torris; the fact that the bowling overreached his anticipations was no defence. Noxon thought that manslaughter was quite bad enough! He paralleled the case of a boxer who kills an opponent by a blow which

might be classed as unfair. We were unhappy enough, in either case; the idea of giving evidence against Faulkner was not very comfortable!

There was a long wait for an ambulance to take away the body. I heard the Chief Constable ask Bingham to undertake the autopsy, as the usual police surgeon was on annual summer leave. Then he went up to Faulkner.

"I'm sorry, Faulkner," he said, "but from what I hear I shall have to ask you to come along. I'm afraid you'll have to face a charge of manslaughter—no, don't talk now: you're not charged yet. We'll get hold of your solicitor at once. I suggest that Noxon comes with you to arrange for bail."

Faulkner, pale and subdued, acquiesced in silence, and the little party drove off. Half an hour later the ambulance arrived, and Bingham went with the body. It was indicative of the atmosphere of unrest that even Bingham, accustomed to death, had not taken off Torris's pads—these outsize pads which had been the direct cause of the tragedy! I noticed this: so did Pontivy.

"Get those pads off!" he whispered. It was his tone of voice which gave me the first hint of untoward events.

I got into the ambulance and took off Torris's pads and batting gloves, dropping them in a corner of our dressing-room.

"Let the others go!" said Pontivy, softly.

Already players were drifting away. Sergeant Wilkins had taken the names and addresses of those on the field, and had warned me—as the nearest spectator—that I would be needed at the inquest.

"It is not going to be the inquest which the worthy sergeant expects," said Pontivy.

"Look here, Papa, what are you getting at?" I asked.

"You know as much as I do—you saw the man die."

"But . . ."

"How did he die?"

"He got a blow over the heart."

"Yes, but that did not kill him. He died after a blow on the knee."

"Maybe delayed action," I suggested.

"I repeat, you saw the man die, and should know better. The man was poisoned!"

"What?"

"Once I caught a German spy," said Papa Pontivy. "He knew that he could not escape, and that I had no mercy. So he swallowed a little phial of poison, and died. I do not forget it, or what he looked like. This man, I say, died the same way."

"But he didn't swallow anything!"

"No. But there are other methods of poisoning a man."

"Just a minute, Papa. Bingham saw him die, too, and he's a doctor."

"A country doctor, in a respectable district. I wonder if he has ever seen a man die of poison?"

"Well, he'll find out!"

"Yes. And in the meantime the murderer will have perfected his alibi."

"But—no one was near Torris!"

"His pads were near him. Always look at the obvious, my dear Newman, and don't bother about this circuitous moves of the detective story. The man died after a blow on the knee—that is a *fact*. The doctor will presumably examine the knee. We will examine the pads. His left knee, was it not?"

Pontivy examined the pad with minute care, while I ensured that he was undisturbed. Five minutes later he called over to me.

"Look! These pads are stiffened with cane. A splinter of cane has been bent back—my guess is that it has been impregnated with poison. A devilish scheme! And it worked!"

"So the murderer is someone who knew that Torris was likely to be hit on the pads!"

"Yes—though that appears to be common knowledge—do not touch that splinter!" he cried.

"I wasn't going to! But the bang over the heart . . ."

"An accident—quite fortuitous."

"Well, what are you going to do? Wait for the result of the autopsy?"

"No. I am quite certain what that will be. But if the murderer is clever, he *must* return to remove this splinter. We will wait, too—and watch."

The pavilion was the usual village hut, with two dressing-rooms under a common roof. I noticed that the rafters supported an accumulation of old nets and other impedimenta. We climbed up to a good vantage point.

Two of the home team came in to collect their kit. Then a long silence. Half an hour must have passed. Then I felt a light tap from Pontivy.

A man had entered the home dressing-room. We could not see him, but heard him turning over the cricket gear. Of course, he would expect to find Torris's pads there. Now he came into our room, and I saw a look of relief on his face as he saw Torris's large-sized pads on the floor.

"I told you that I knew what the result of the autopsy would be," Pontivy whispered, very faintly. "Heart failure—*not* poison!"

Dr. Bingham! I saw him pick up the left pad, and press with a tiny pair of scissors at the inside of the knee-cap. Bingham? Of course; I ought to have sus-

pected him earlier. Swiftly my mind ran the gamut of detection. Motive? The scandal about Torris and his wife. Opportunity? The knowledge that Faulkner would bowl body-line. The early arrival at the ground, while Torris was out on the pitch. The opportunity as a doctor to procure poisons, and the knowledge to use them.

Of course, it *must* be Bingham. Was the absence of the police surgeon fortuitous? No, the crime had been fitted to the period. Yes, and his character fitted the crime, too—that selfish nature would see another man suffer in his place. Only if another were condemned would his own security be complete.

"Life is a collection of trifles, Dr. Bingham," said Pontivy from the rafters. "If only you could have removed the pads yourself, at the mortuary. . . ."

I saw terror in Bingham's eyes. As I dropped to the ground beside him, I thought that he was preparing to fight. Then he accepted the inevitable, and jabbed his hand sharply against the protruding splinter of Torris's pads.

Diamonds for the Million

MAURICE PROCTER

UPON his arrival the United States Treasury agent conformed to the usual practice of visiting detectives: he notified the local force of his presence. The local force, in this instance, was the London Metropolitan Police, and the station at which he presented himself was New Scotland Yard.

Because his mission was a 'foreign inquiry', the Treasury agent, John Norton, was introduced to Chief Inspector Warwick of the Special Branch, and, from the beginning, Warwick was interested. Norton was chasing one million dollars in stolen currency, and the pursuit of money is always interesting.

It was a bright winter morning, and sunshine warmed the room as the American and the Englishman sat and talked—and took each other's measure. They liked each other immediately. Each man knew his business, and neither was noticeably vain about it. And they shared a relentless determination in their pursuit of criminals.

Norton had produced photographs of the man he was after. Warwick studied them. "Ralph Mercer," he said, reading the name.

Mercer had a bull neck, a handsome face and a carefree grin. Probably the pictures had been taken when he was beginning a term in an American prison, but he didn't look at all worried.

"Cheerful geezer," Warwick commented. "And he

brought the money over here to make a deal? What's he after? Narcotics?"

"He never handles narcotics. He was a jeweller at one time."

"I see. But—a million dollars' worth of diamonds?"

"That's right."

"H'm." Warwick seemed doubtful. Norton waited quietly.

"Where would anybody steal a million dollars?" asked the Scotland Yard man. "From a bank?"

"It was lifted from a United States Treasury office."

"Stolen from the *Treasury*!"

"From an office belonging to the Treasury. It was money that had never been issued. I have the numbers of the bills."

"Did Mercer do the job?"

"No. He doesn't even know the money is stolen. It's top secret. If it leaks out, heads will roll in the Treasury."

"I can well imagine it. Just what happened?"

"A guy called Danny Bolinski started it. He's a hanger-on in a big criminal outfit. He located the money, but he left it alone for a while because he knew it'd be red hot. Then he heard that Mercer was trying to raise capital to bring a big parcel of diamonds from England. Mercer has a reputation with diamonds, and he's done a lot of illegal importing. Bolinski approached Mercer and said he was acting for his boss in the outfit. He said there was a million available to buy diamonds. Knowing the outfit, Mercer believed him. He got ready to come to England. Right on the deadline, Bolinski cracked the joint, got the money, and sent Mercer away with it before it burned his fingers. He knew Mercer would play it straight because he wouldn't dare double-cross the top man."

Warwick grinned appreciatively. "Oh, very neat!" he said.

"The only thing wrong with it, for Bolinski, is that we picked him up and made him talk."

"This will be *very* interesting. Diamonds, probably stolen, sold for a stolen million. What a lovely crooked job!"

"Glad you like it," said Norton. "I want that money. I couldn't care less about the diamonds."

"I'll take the diamonds. I hope Mercer isn't expecting interference. Will he know you're walking right behind him?"

"I don't think so. He doesn't know how hot the money is. I figure he'll only take the normal precautions."

"What about the contact with this side? Somebody had to dig up a million dollars' worth of diamonds. Did Bolinski know anything about that?"

The American shook his head. "Not much," he said. "Only a name he heard. A man called Hunziger."

Warwick sat back in his chair and stared at his visitor. "You're sure it's Hunziger?" he asked in a peculiar tone.

"That was the name, all right. He didn't know the first name."

"Oh, my dear fellow," said the Yard man. "Any policeman in England would give two fingers and a toe to get hold of Hunziger. Know what you've done? Walked smack into the middle of the biggest murder job in years. It's only two hours old, but it's started a Security flap from one end of Whitehall to the other."

Warwick pushed a file of documents across the desk; then he picked up a telephone and dialled a number.

Norton was professionally interested in a specimen of Scotland Yard paper work. He read the brief array of

facts which preceded an inquiry from a superintendent of the murder squad. The superintendent was asking the Special Branch for information about Frederick Tempest, O.M., Ph.D., D.Sc., etc., who had been found strangled with a length of cord in his bachelor apartment that morning. The crime had been committed between eleven and twelve o'clock the previous night.

Reading on, Norton could readily understand the agitation in Whitehall. Tempest had been a nuclear-fission man, and though he had withdrawn from government-sponsored atomic work after Hiroshima, his head had still been full of dangerous knowledge.

Hunziger was clearly implicated. His finger-prints had been found all over Tempest's flat, and the bow-string was known to be his favourite method of murder. To the American agent it seemed entirely probable that the killing had some connection with his own mission in London.

"Yeah, I walked into it," he agreed, as Warwick put down the telephone.

"Yes. It ties in with your information. Hunziger is an extremely successful jewel thief, and diamonds are his specialty."

"Tell me about him."

"I wish I could, old boy," was Warwick's regretful answer. "We've been after him for six years, and we don't even know what he looks like. The only thing we've got on him are his finger-prints. In six years he's done seven big jewel jobs, and three of them have been murders. For a long time we just called him Mr. Prints. Then we got a name, Hunziger, from a dying man. He's a queer type. He cases his jobs thoroughly, but when he cracks them he leaves his dabs all over the place, as if he doesn't care. Our finger-print men simply

go along and puff their dust around, and there you are —Hunziger again."

"Do all his murders have a robbery motive?"

"Yes, except this fourth murder, which doesn't seem to have any motive. We can't even guess what Hunziger could want from Tempest."

"Could Tempest have been in some diamond racket?" Norton wanted to know. "Smuggling, for instance?"

"That's always possible, but I'd say it's very unlikely. I'd say Tempest was honest."

"A good guy, huh?"

"A great man, I always thought. I met him a number of times when I was working on security with M.I.5. I don't think he was greatly interested in money."

"I'm figuring he was interested in diamonds. I can't see Hunziger, whoever he is, handling a million-dollar deal and a murder at the same time, unless it's all the same job."

"Nor I," Warwick agreed. "If we find Mercer, we may get next to Hunziger. In any case, we must locate your man as soon as possible. A million dollars. . . ."

"A murderous sum," said Norton. . . .

An American in London is just as easily identified as an Englishman in Chicago. That afternoon Ralph Mercer ventured out of doors, under the impression that he looked like a Londoner. He was spotted in the Strand and followed to a small hotel in Norfolk Street.

The police closed in suddenly on Mercer's hotel room, and he was arrested without violence. When he was searched, a shallow, polished leather box full of gems was found in his pocket. It was a fabulous collection: four hundred large, perfect white diamonds.

Evidently Mercer wasn't expecting the police. Evidently, too, since he carried so much treasure so nonchalantly, he had some reliable way of avoiding Customs barriers.

When Norton openly admired the diamonds, Mercer glared at him. "You an American?" he demanded. "Why are you here with the limey cops?"

"That money Bolinski gave you was stolen from a United States government office," Norton said coldly.

Mercer was too shocked to answer.

A search crew was left in the room, and the prisoner was taken to the nearest police station. There he was interrogated, but he wouldn't talk.

"Too bad," Warwick said to Norton, when the questioning was over. "We'll leave it until we know something about those stones. I'll get Grafton Devine. He's the expert we usually consult. There's money just in *knowing* about diamonds, man. Devine is about the top independent expert in London, and he does damn' well for himself. Charges us very little, though; says he likes to see our police at work."

But Mr. Devine was not available. He was away on business, his secretary said. So Warwick called up Tim Lake, a small, spare, lively man from the Precious Stone Laboratory in Hatton Garden. Lake arrived with a suit-case full of instruments, and his glance immediately focused on the box of diamonds.

"Is this the stuff?" he asked. At Warwick's nod he opened the box and stood staring at the contents in utter astonishment.

"Are they diamonds?" Inspector Warwick asked.

"My goodness, yes! And *what* diamonds! Heavens, man, where did you get this lot?"

The refracted sunlight made the close-packed gems

seem to burn with ten thousand points of white fire.

"What will they be worth?" Norton asked.

"A million pounds, I shouldn't wonder," said Lake. He picked up a ten-carat brilliant and turned it in the sunlight. It threw out rays like a star.

He set to work, picking out diamonds at random and testing them with a small square plate of polished corundum. They scratched the plate easily. "Nothing in the world like a diamond," Lake said fondly. "As old as the earth, as clear as spring water, as indestructible as faith."

He opened a black leather case and produced an instrument which looked like a baby ciné camera. "Rutile refractometer," he explained. "Absolutely the latest thing. Gives you readings you wouldn't believe." He fiddled with the new toy for some time; then he said, as he peered through the eyepiece, "Lovely reading. Two point four one seven. It couldn't be anything else but a diamond with a refraction like that."

Lake's next instrument was a binocular microscope with a queer, built-in lighting arrangement. He plugged it into a wall socket. "Now," he said. "I'll see if I can tell you where these stones were mined."

He put a large brilliant on the cradle and stared through the eyepiece. At once there was a subtle change in his attitude. For a long time he was quite still, and the watching men grew tense.

At last Lake put the brilliant aside and picked up a baton diamond, a polished oblong of great beauty. Then he tried an emerald-cut, then another brilliant. Presently he looked up.

"I've never seen anything like the inclusions in these stones," he said in a worried voice. "It seems in-

credible, impossible, almost—but . . ." He had another long look through the microscope, then he stood up straight. "It's quite incredible," he said, "but I feel sure these diamonds are not natural stones."

"You mean they're artificial?" Warwick asked quickly.

"Products of human artifice, yes. They're synthetic."

Mercer had been present throughout the examination and his comment was a rude word. Tim Lake looked at him with sympathy. Of all the men there, Lake was the one most capable of understanding the one-time jeweller's scorn and disbelief.

"They're really fine gems," he said, seeming to apologise for the stones. "They're as hard and bright as diamonds. In fact, they *are* diamonds—but not natural stones. It's a great pity. Such lovely, clean gems."

"What are you guys trying to pull?" Mercer demanded. "There's no such thing as a synethic diamond."

"It had to come sometime," Lake said. "Sooner or later somebody was bound to find out how to make a diamond. Synthetic sapphires and emeralds have been on the market for years."

"Diamonds are different," Mercer said stubbornly. "Nobody could make a diamond."

"It certainly is hard to believe," said Lake. He became thoughtful. "There is one more test I can do here. Could we have these blinds down, Chief Inspector?"

Warwick switched on the lights and pulled down the blinds. Meanwhile, from his suit-case Lake brought out a compact little ultra-violet lamp with a black glass filter. He plugged it in and waited for it to warm up.

"If these are natural stones they'll fluoresce irregularly," he said. "Some will glow brightly, some dimly.

And in different colours: mostly blue, some yellow and a few green."

Warwick switched off the lights, and the onlookers waited in the shadowed room.

Tim Lake put the open box into the lamp's rays, and uttered an exclamation of surprise. The compact array of gems gave off a vivid orange glow which coloured the gloom. They were a beautiful sight, all evenly bright and evenly orange.

"I shall want to make further tests in the laboratory, but this quite convinces me," said Lake, holding the glowing box of stones and looking like a sorcerer. "No parcel of natural stones in the world ever fluoresced all this colour. And look at the uniform brightness; all exactly alike."

Mercer moved suddenly, and Warwick and Norton jumped to intercept him. The ex-jeweller thrust his left hand into the ultra-violet rays. There was a solitaire diamond on the middle finger, a good stone about a half-carat in weight. As if to emphasise the difference between synthetic gem and true stone, the diamond glowed with a bright, sky-blue fluorescence.

After the examination of the diamonds, Warwick telephoned Mercer's hotel room. "Found anything?" he demanded.

"Believe it or not, sir," answered the sergeant-in-charge. "Hunziger's prints are here."

"Splendid," said the Special Branch man. Obviously his prisoner had seen and conversed with Hunziger.

He rang up Tempest's flat. "Any sign of a motive yet?" he asked.

"Never a one," was the reply.

"You haven't found any diamonds, by any chance?"

Knowing Hunziger's record, the man at the other

end was not surprised by the question. "We've found half a dozen dull bits of stuff which *might* be uncut diamonds," he said doubtfully.

"What! You have?" Warwick shouted. "Send them over here!"

Fifteen minutes later a detective arrived with the uncut stones, and Tim Lake looked at them. They had the greasy feel and the frosted look of genuine 'rough', but they were synthetic. The tests left no doubt of it.

"Another link between Mercer, Tempest and Hunziger," Warwick said jubilantly. "This job is going like a dream. We'll catch that slippery devil and hang him."

In that mood of savage geniality he turned to his prisoner. With murder as the next item on the agenda, the ex-jeweller was in some haste to establish an alibi. He admitted that the dollars-for-diamonds deal had been consummated in his hotel room between nine and ten o'clock the previous night. Afterward, from ten to midnight, he had been steadily drinking Scotch and soda in the hotel bar, and then had gone straight up to bed. The waiter and the porter and the upstairs maid could back up his story, he said.

"That has to be verified," said Warwick. "You're not in the clear. It *was* Hunziger brought you the diamonds and took off with the dollars—wasn't it?"

"I never knew the guy's name," said Mercer.

"What was he like?"

"I didn't notice."

"About what age was he?"

"I can't remember."

"Look here," said Warwick in exasperation. "That man has swindled you and involved you in a murder. You could still be an accessory. And don't forget, if

you get ten or fifteen years in this country you'll serve your sentence. Cold cells at Dartmoor, and killing work in the quarries. No talking, no smoking, and damned little to eat. It's horrible, man!"

Mercer was shaken by the not-quite-truthful picture of penal servitude, but he didn't break down. "I'm not talking," he said.

"You're helping Hunziger to get away. He'll take a cool million abroad. He'll be having a lovely time with the girls while you're looking through the bars and longing for a smoke."

"I'm not talking," said Mercer.

"I can't understand you," said Warwick. "This man has done you down. You've nothing to be afraid of. He has no mob behind him. He's a lone wolf, and when we catch him he'll swing. There's no reason for you to keep your mouth shut."

"I never blabbed to the cops," said Mercer, "and I never will."

So it went on. While the renewed hue and cry for Hunziger gathered momentum, Warwick sweated Mercer for hours. But the prisoner would give no information. At last the Yard man gave up, temporarily. He took Norton out to a pub.

"I'm afraid I was over-confident," he admitted, as they sat at a bar, eating turkey sandwiches and drinking ale. "The job was going too fast, and now it's broken down. I don't know what the devil to make of Mercer. Why won't he talk?"

"Tradition," Norton said solemnly.

"The obstinate blighter," said Warwick. "I'd like to bang his head against a wall."

"Why not? Why don't you get rough with him?"

"If he were British it would have been done, long since. But he's an American citizen. I don't want a

consular inquiry about rough treatment. Bad for my promotion.

"I wish I could get a clear picture of Tempest's connection with the job," Warwick went on uneasily. "It sounds slightly incredible, but it looks as if he were the man who made those fake diamonds. After all, *somebody* made them. But why did he have dealings with a fellow like Hunziger? It looks as if Hunziger had been entrusted with the diamonds to sell. He sold them, and then went back and gave Tempest the chop. Why in heaven did he do that? He was in possession of a million dollars, and all that he had to do was disappear."

"He went back to get the diamond-making process, and then he killed Tempest to keep him quiet," said Norton. "That epitomises a whole pattern of existence. A man uses his patience, capital and knowledge in making a great discovery. Then some crook not fit to walk within a hundred miles of him comes along and takes everything. That's what always happens when thieves come in contact with creative men. It burns me to see them getting away with it."

"Hold on a minute," said Warwick. "*If* Tempest was accessory to the sale of four hundred home-made diamonds for a million dollars he was a bit of a thief himself."

"No," Norton replied. "That doesn't sound like Tempest at all." He tapped an evening newspaper which lay on the bar. "I've been reading his obituary. He must have been a fine man. In his lifetime he passed up a lot of chances to make himself rich. He wouldn't join in a swindle."

"Suppose he'd used up all his capital? You can put that in your pattern of existence—what many a good man has to do for the sake of the ready."

"That wouldn't make Tempest turn crooked. I'm sure of it."

"You think Tempest was kidded along, swindled, robbed of his secret and murdered?"

"That's what I think," Norton said grimly.

There was a thoughtful silence; then Warwick said, "The only thing we can do is keep on trying to soften up Mercer. Let's go and have another session with him."

As the day drew to its close, the search for Hunziger required more and more men. The word was out to all districts, from Dover to Holyhead and from Plymouth to Aberdeen. The newspapers had the story too. They did not know that the great sum in dollars was stolen money, but it was still a perfect story. MILLION DOLLAR FUGITIVE, the headlines shouted.

Throughout the rest of the day and night, thousands of men were questioned and dozens arrested and released, but Hunziger was not seen. There were many reports from civilian sources, but not one of them led the police to the wanted man. Several crackpots gave themselves up at police stations, to be kicked out by irritable detectives when it was found that they were not and could not have been Hunziger.

"I'm scared," Warwick admitted. "I'm afraid he scarpered before you even arrived in town. We're making no progress. Midnight, and we haven't even found Tempest's laboratory. I hope Tim Lake was right about those stones. He's good, but I'd have felt safer with Grafton Devine. With him we'd be certain."

Still, whether or not he had made the diamonds, Tempest had not been the sort of man to be idle. He would have had a laboratory somewhere. Every routine means had been used to find his name in connection with premises away from his home, and now it was

feared that he had operated his laboratory under a false name or a company name. But the labour of seeking, telephoning and questioning went on, as the minutes and hours marched away.

It was four o'clock in the morning when the first information came in. It was from an unexpected quarter. A constable on night duty out at Potter's Bar had been gossiping with the watchman of a brickyard. The watchman had also been a truck-driver for the same firm. He had seen Tempest's picture in the *Evening Standard*, and he was quite sure that he had delivered several loads of high-grade firebricks to him at a place in Rotherhithe about three years before.

The constable called up the manager of the brickyard, who referred him to the firm's London traveller. The traveller said, "Rotherhithe. I remember. It was a single order. Afterward I called regularly for a time, but the place was always locked up. The address is the Old Brewery, Tobago Lane."

Warwick and Norton were still at Scotland Yard when the news was transmitted to the Information Room.

"Rotherhithe," said Warwick. "Let's go there."

He drove across Westminster Bridge towards south-east London. The car made good time along the empty streets.

In Jamaica Road, they met an elderly sergeant of M Division. "You can't mistake it," he said. "It stands by itself in the middle of bombed-out ground. Turn left at Lower Road."

They found Tobago Lane within sight of the cranes, masts and funnels of the Surrey Commercial Docks. The Lane itself was a stretch of cobbles across ground which had once been covered with warehouses. But the

Old Brewery had been spared. In the middle of the cleared ground it stood alone, an L-shaped building with a stubby, square chimney-stack.

They left the car and approached on foot. Looking around, they found that the place was locked up, as the traveller in bricks had found it so many times.

"There's a window here might do," said Warwick, taking out his penknife.

He slipped the catch and opened the window. They climbed through, into a dusty store-room. From there they walked into a long laboratory furnished with benches and oven-like metallurgical furnaces. Those small furnaces could not possibly have raised the almost atomic heat which would be necessary to make diamonds. There would have to be something bigger. The two men moved along, looking for it. They stepped quietly on the stone floor.

At the end of the room there was a small office, and opposite to it was a big alcove. Most of the alcove was occupied by empty oil drums which were piled precariously almost to the ceiling, but in a small cleared-off space a huge flagstone had been tiled by some mechanism, so that it gave access to a cellar. The investigators stopped when they saw it.

"Our man's been here," Warwick whispered.

"Correct. Don't move," said someone behind them. "Now put your hands up."

They stood still while they were deftly searched. Then the voice said, "All right. Turn around."

They turned, and saw a man of medium height, ordinary in general appearance. But the eyes in his dark, sardonic face were not ordinary. They were so black that iris and pupil seemed to glow with the same flat, disturbing intensity. In that moment of strain

they were like the eyes of some predatory animal.

The man held a Luger pistol in his right hand, and there was a suit-case on the floor at his left. Obviously he had been hiding behind one of the furnaces.

Because he knew the man, Warwick was less apprehensive than he ought to have been. "Devine!" he exclaimed. "How do you come into this? I thought——" He stopped, then said, "No wonder you weren't in your office yesterday. You were busy! *You're Hunziger!*"

"To my friends," was the cool reply.

"How nice for you! Grafton Devine, the diamond expert, moving freely among the big stuff, picking your jobs. Ye gods, the police have been slow!"

"On the contrary, I should congratulate you," said Hunziger. "I didn't think you would find this place so soon."

Norton was looking at the suitcase. "The plunder, huh?" he said. "Have you got it all?"

"Of course. But—— An American? Why are *you* here?"

"Looking for the money you've got there."

"So it was stolen money. I wondered about that. No matter. It can be changed easily enough in France."

"How long have you been here?" asked Warwick.

"I'll answer that one too. In fact, it's a pleasant change to talk to somebody. I've been here eighteen hours, culling information from Tempest's files. I've got all I want, except details of the actual plant. I must see that. Unfortunately I had to move a lot of filthy oil drums to find the cellar entrance. I'd just got it open when you arrived."

"How did you get in with Tempest?"

"My dear Warwick, you forget my reputation. Even Scotland Yard consults me. Tempest came to me in strictest confidence and asked me how to go about the business of selling synthetic diamonds. *Very* interesting!

I told him to keep quiet while I looked around for a market, and the rest was easy."

"Ralph Mercer was your market," said Norton. "How much did Tempest want for his diamonds?"

"He was delighted with an imaginary offer of sixty thousand dollars for the four hundred stones he had ready," Hunziger replied. "He entrusted them to me without a murmur."

"And you sold them for a million and murdered the poor guy to get his secret," Norton said contemptuously.

The cold voice cut Hunziger's complacency like a whiplash. His dark glance appraised Norton, and he felt the other man's enmity. His response in the circumstances was typical: a mocking smile. "Yes," he said. "Apparently you know it all, but you won't live to talk about it. Now I want to see what is downstairs. Go on down those steps. Turn on those lights. And remember, don't try anything. I'm a practised hand with a pistol."

They walked down stairs fitted with rubber mats.

The cellar had two floors, each as large as the room above, but for two-thirds of their area they were packed to the ceiling with earth and rubble. This obviously had been taken from a wide semi-circular shaft which had been sunk a good thirty feet down beyond the lower floor. Rising from the shaft was a tapering tower of yellow firebrick. It leaned slightly, and where it joined the cellar wall below the square chimney there were round white doors like staring eyes. From the lower floor, thick asbestos-covered pipes snaked down to its base.

"That's a furnace," said Hunziger. "The narrowest, hottest furnace you'll ever see. I expected something like this. It is nothing less than an artificial volcanic

pipe. Unprecedented heat in a confined space. Tempest has reproduced the conditions under which nature made diamonds."

There was a deep humming sound, and the floor of the cellar began to vibrate. "What's that?" Hunziger snapped, alert and vicious. He was a changed man. His pistol became an active menace.

Someone answered him calmly, but in a voice of thunder. "You have less than three minutes to get out of here."

"That's Frederick Tempest!" Warwick gasped.

The voice went on, "This is the only sure way of protecting my secrets. When you walked down the stairs you stepped on a switch. In three minutes, which is the length of this record, the place will be on fire from end to end. The fans are driving vaporised fuel into the cold furnace. It will ignite at a certain pressure and burn explosively enough to burst the furnace. Get out now, while you have the chance."

The voice stopped, and there was no sound but the humming of the powerful fans. They seemed to shake the whole building.

The listeners had instinctively edged nearer to the cellar steps. Hunziger was at the foot, while his captives stood apart, five yards from him. He was smiling again. The others could almost read his thoughts. This would be a sweet cremation job. It was just a pity he hadn't been able to examine the furnace.

Warwick and Norton stood helpless, white-faced as they looked at death. They were brave men, and all they asked was a fighting chance; but they were also human, and death was unwelcome. Norton's glance showed his angry unwillingness to accept the final defeat from this smooth murderer.

The disembodied voice began again. "You have less

than two minutes to get out . . ." And as Hunziger's gun shifted to point at Norton's heart, the fighting chance came.

There was a great crash overhead, then a confused bumping and rolling. Hunziger had been careless in piling the oil drums, and the vibration of the fans had overbalanced a shaky stack. One stout drum came rolling and bounding down the cellar stairs.

Hunziger turned involuntarily, and, hampered by the suit-case in his left hand, jumped to avoid the drum. In that instant his two enemies leaped into action, and the simultaneous attack confused him. His pistol wavered before he fired. His bullet grazed Norton's head; then he went down, with both men on top of him. Warwick grabbed the gun while Norton got strong fingers inside Hunziger's collar and in an excess of fury banged his head hard and often on the stone floor.

Tempest's voice was still calmly announcing his warning. Warwick dragged and heaved the half-conscious Hunziger up the cellar steps, and Norton followed with the suit-case. They did not stop until they were at a safe distance from the building.

It was a good explosion. There was a heavy rumbling sound, and then the building appeared to have burst a blood vessel. The windows had a dull-red suffused look, and the walls seemed to swell. Then the windows flew out, and soon the place was a roofless ruin from which solid, perpendicular flames roared skyward.

Warwick called the fire brigade and returned to stare ruefully at the blaze. "What a ruddy job this has turned out to be," he grumbled. "You tread on the mat and set the place alight. Let's go. We can't just stand here watching a fire." . . .

At Bow Street, Mercer was roused and brought into the Charge-Room to confront Hunziger. He immediately rushed at the man and struck him before he could be dragged away.

"I figure they've met before," said Norton dryly. "You could call that a sort of identification."

He opened the suit-case and removed two loose-leaf books. Beneath the books, flat bundles of brand-new hundred-dollar notes were neatly packed: sixteen bundles in a layer, six layers, and four bundles over. It was all there—one million dollars.

He checked numbers from a note-book and closely examined some of the notes. "This is it, for sure," he said.

Warwick grinned. "Now, let battle commence. The money belongs to the United States, but the British Treasury will object to a million dollars going out of the country if it wasn't declared when it was brought in."

"There'll be no trouble," said Norton. "It'll go to the Bank of England, to be repulped in the presence of the usual witnesses."

Hunziger was recovering. "Counterfeit!" he said bitterly.

"As crooked as you are," said Norton. "It was made by the Germans during the war, as an item of currency sabotage. But it was never issued, and our troops found it after the war and sent it to Washington. Most of it was destroyed, but some sap in the Treasury thought he'd like to have a million dollars right there in his office. Well, somebody talked and it was stolen. My task was to recover it before it got into circulation."

Hunziger looked with hatred at Ralph Mercer.

"Don't blame him," said Norton with false sympathy. "He was the biggest sucker of all time. He never knew anything."

Mercer was not insulted. He no longer had to worry

about having been swindled out of a million dollars. His reputation as an honest illegal trader in gems was intact.

Warwick drew Norton aside. "Why didn't you tell *me* it was snide money?" he asked reproachfully.

"Sorry, old man," was the reply. "My orders were to tell nobody till I'd gotten the stuff. Besides, you might have lost interest in it. You see, I had to get it at any cost."

The Scotland Yard man sighed, and nodded to admit the wisdom of Norton's reticence. The sum of one million dollars had appealed to his imagination. But a gleam came into his eyes as he looked at Hunziger. "I've got him, anyway," he said.

The American agent went to the table and picked up the loose-leaf books. He glanced through them, letting the edges of the pages fall away from his thumb. He looked at the titles: *Carbon Treatment*, and *Heat and Pressure.* Hunziger appeared to have been knowledgable in his selection of material. Obviously the two books contained the summation of Tempest's years of research.

"The value of this'll be in industrial diamonds," said Norton. "The miners and engineers of the world need them. And our Mr. Hunziger preserved this knowledge for posterity. If he'd looked in the cellar before he made his notes, everything would have been destroyed. There's a certain irony in that. Yes, sir, a certain irony. Poor Tempest is dead, but wherever he is I think he'll be satisfied with the outcome of this. His own arrangements helped to make it so no crook got anything out of the deal."

The rasp came into his voice as he looked at the prisoners. "You hear that, you fools? You were licked from the start."

Rubber Gloves

L. A. G. STRONG

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR ELLIS McKAY stuck out his lower lip, and sat in pop-eyed contemplation of the report before him. Mason, the managing director of the firm, watched him with covert amusement.

Ellis looked up. "You're right. It couldn't have been an accident. Any finger-prints on this metal rule thing?"

Detective-Inspector Bradstreet shook his head.

"No," he replied, his soft Devon accent unmistakable even in the monosyllable. " 'Tis smeared, like. A odd mark or two, though."

"Mark? Made by what?"

"Can't say, not yet."

Ellis got up briskly. "Well, we'd better go to the hospital and see this chap Jervis. I'd like you to come, Mr. Mason, if you would. Make it look more like a visit of condolence. He'll talk more freely if you're with us."

Mason smiled wryly. "If you like."

"Where's the hurry?" Bradstreet wanted to know. "Why not wait till he's fit to attend the inquest?"

"I've a fancy to hear what he has to say. And, if we adjourn the whole inquest, folk may smell a rat. Tell me about Jervis, Mr. Mason. What's his job with the company?"

"He's the accountant. Model employee. Nobody likes him. Does his own work perfectly, and criticises others."

"What was he doing in the engine-room? Surely his work didn't take him there?"

"It shouldn't, in theory. In practice, he was all over the place, poking his nose into this and that."

"Do you allow that sort of thing?"

"I've had him on the carpet about it, more than once. Trouble is, he's always got a perfectly good reason. He's saved the firm a lot of money, these past few years; there's no denying that."

They found the injured accountant propped up stiffly, in a high state of indignation. At the sight of Mason, he burst out immediately.

"It's exceedingly vexatious," he exclaimed. "Young Kelly interfered most unwarrantably. His action was quite uncalled for."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, Jarvis," Mason replied soothingly. "He only wanted to save your life, you know."

"Save my life!" the injured man barked, then winced in pain at his own vehemence. His shoulder had been badly dislocated. "Save my life! I like that, I must say. He might have injured me most seriously." He broke off and squinted anxiously at Mason. "I want to be sure of my legal position."

"Your *legal* position?"

"With a view to compensation."

"That's not for us to decide," Mason told him. "We hand over all that to the insurance company."

"You may find," Ellis cut in, "that the doctrine of common employment is involved."

"Common employment?" Jervis gave Ellis his attention for the first time.

"Yes," Ellis went on, shaking his head. "Tricky business. I wouldn't care to pronounce on it."

Jervis swallowed and glared. Before he could reply, Mason took his chance.

"This is Chief Detective-Inspector McKay. And Inspector Bradstreet."

Jervis eyed Ellis suspiciously.

"What's he want?"

"There has to be an inquest," Mason answered. "And, since you can't attend——"

"But I must attend. It's imperative. No one else can explain——"

"That's where I come in." Ellis beamed at the flustered man. "You shall explain to me now, and Inspector Bradstreet here shall take it down word for word. We'll give you a typed copy, so that you can be sure that nothing you want to say is left out."

"It's most irregular," Jervis complained. "The inquest must be postponed."

"That's not possible, I'm afraid. But I'll see that your statement is put in, exactly as you give it."

After a brief objection, Jervis gave way. It was clear that his strength was not equal to an argument. Before he could get set to tell his story, Ellis startled him with a question.

"What were you doing in the engine-room, Mr. Jervis? Your duties do not naturally take you there?"

The accountant's reply was a monologue and may be so set down.

"I'd gone through to speak to Cole, the Chief Engineer, about the costings of his branch. I was not satisfied with their method of keeping accounts. Expenses not properly vouched; tools and material taken from store without any receipt, except someone's initials scrawled on a twopenny note-book covered with oily thumb marks. Most unbusiness-like. I'd been there several times on the same errand, but had got no

atisfaction. Cole simply ignored all my suggestions and dvice. I was not prepared to let it go at that. It was is manifest duty to establish a proper system, and I intended to tell him straight out that, unless there was an improvement, a very definite improvement, I would take the matter to the partners.

"As I came down the stair in the engine-room, I saw Cole at the far end of the gangway, between the two turbo-alternators. He was leaning over the guard rail of number two, which was running. Kelly, a young fitter, was a couple of yards nearer him, oiling number one for its next spell. We generate our own current, and use the engines alternately, unless there is very heavy pressure of work, when both are needed. There should have been a man at the switchboard in the corner opposite the stair. No, I can't say whether he was there or not. In any case, he would have been out of my sight behind Number One. No," (in answer to a question from Ellis) "there was no one at the bottom of the stair at right-angles to the gangway.

"When I reached the floor, I put on my rubber gloves, as I always do if the dynamos are working. I have been sneered at for taking this sensible precaution, but, as Mr. Mason will tell you, the firm maintains a strictly safety-first policy, and, as a loyal senior official, I always make a point of setting a good example."

Here Mason nodded.

"I am careful by nature," the accountant went on. "I once got a severe shock when putting in an ordinary electric light bulb; an experience which further impressed upon me to avoid unnecessary risks.

"Only a few seconds after I had put on my gloves, I heard a scream. It sank almost immediately to a whimper, and stopped. I ran towards the gangway, and Kelly shouted to throw the switches. When I

turned the corner, I could see Cole writhing across t[illegible] guard rail. I ran to pull him away, but Kelly flu[illegible] himself on me, and knocked me down, just as the ligh[illegible] went out."

This was all of Jervis's statement that mattered. The rest of it was a repetition of complaints against Kelly for interfering. The idea that he should be grateful to the engineer for attempting to save his life seemed to rouse him to especial indignation. The most that Ellis and Mason could get from him was a grudging acknowledgment of Kelly's good intentions; and even these he seemed to think characteristic of a fool.

"Just one more question, Mr. Jervis," Ellis said. "I can see that you are tired, and we don't want to trouble you unduly. Can you suggest a reason for Cole's neglect in the matter of accounts?"

"Reason? The man was idle and careless. The fact that he was expert at one branch of his work did not justify his neglecting another."

"You are convinced it was just carelessness? There was no more sinister reason? I mean—you had no grounds for suspecting any sort of hanky-panky?"

"Hanky-panky?"

"No money missing? No stores going where they shouldn't?"

Sitting up as straight as he could, the accountant glared at Ellis like an injured bird.

"You must have a very inadequate idea of my abilities as an accountant, if you imagine that I should not have detected anything of that kind."

"On the contrary, Mr. Jervis, I was assuming that possibly you *had* detected something of that kind, and were checking up on it."

"Your assumption is quite unjustified, sir. I will not allow you to make me impute motives of that sort. If

the accounts were kept as I had shown Cole they ought to be, any leakage would be apparent at once. Automatically. Under the system or lack of system in the department, it could only be done at cost of much time and trouble. But I was quite capable of doing it: and did."

"Forgive me for harping on this question, Mr. Jervis, but it seems odd that Cole wasn't anxious to straighten things out, when he was responsible for them. I am just wondering whether he had any particular reason for taking the line he did?"

Jervis snorted. "Whatever such conduct might mean in other men, it was not peculiar in Cole. It was part of his character. He always played the lone wolf in the firm. Refused to co-operate. Wanted to keep everything to himself. He resented anybody, no matter how much abler than himself, taking an interest in his department. But I would never for a moment question his honesty. It is not for me to cast suspicion on the dead."

He was so indignant that it took Mason and Ellis a couple of minutes to quiet him down. They left him with promises that the typed copy of his statement should be in his hands at about tea-time that afternoon.

"Well?" Ellis looked at his two companions. "How does it strike you?"

"It seems pretty straightforward," Mason answered. "Jervis is irritating and pernickety, as you can see, but we've always found him honest to a fault, and I see no reason to doubt his word. Do you?"

"One or two points strike me as odd, I must confess. However, I won't bother you with them at this stage. I would like someone to go over his accounts."

"Jervis's accounts?" Mason stared, managing to

convey that the question was not quite in good taste. "Oh, certainly, if you wish."

"Tell me about Kelly. He's Cole's assistant, isn't he?"

"Yes. An excellent man. Shrewd, practical, popular with the staff."

"No grudge against Cole?"

Mason's eyes opened very wide.

"That's unimaginable," he said. "He was a most loyal assistant."

"Or against Jervis? I mean, we've all assumed that his motive was to save Jervis. Don't mind my nasty suspicious nature. That's what I'm paid for. Kelly might have been making sure that Jervis didn't interfere before the current had done its work."

"In that case, he'd hardly have called out to throw the switches."

"It would have looked very bad if he hadn't. He may have known that the other man was some distance from them. Well, Mason, thank you very much indeed for all your help. We'll meet tomorrow at the inquest."

The inquest produced no more than Ellis intended. The first witness, Cole's panel doctor, and the police surgeon who did the post-mortem, had little to say beyond agreeing that Cole's heart was not in good condition anyhow, and that his death must have been instantaneous.

Then came Kelly. The engineer harboured an obvious grievance against Jervis, but gave his evidence honestly and directly. Bidden by the Coroner to tell his story in his own words, he said that he was working a few yards from Mr. Cole, but didn't rightly see him killed, as his back was turned.

"I heard him scream, and I spun round, and he was squirming across the guard rail. He gave a sort of

wheezing sigh, and the puff of life went out of him. I shouted to Jock to throw the switches, but it was too late. I served my time in the power station, and saw one of the lads wiped out the same way."

"What did you do next?"

"I jumped over the rail of the engine I was cleaning, and then I saw Mr. Jervis come running round the corner and making for Mr. Cole as fast as he could pelt. I knew what would happen if he touched the body. There was no time to argue, so I gave him a Rugby tackle, and brought him down before he could kill himself."

"Didn't you notice that he was wearing rubber gloves?"

"How was I to be looking whether he had rubber gloves, or a wrist-watch, and I lepping on him to save his life?"

There were titters at this, promptly suppressed by the Coroner, who went on to Kelly, "You did your honest best to protect him from what you believed, rightly or wrongly, to be grave danger?"

"Faith, grave is the word for it, sir. I'm as sure as I'm talking to you here that I stood between that little man and his coffin, gloves or no gloves. And a fat lot of thanks I got for it."

Kelly stepped down, and the Coroner observed that it seemed clear that the first shock was fatal, and that Cole could not have been saved, even if Jervis had reached him. It might be some satisfaction to Kelly, if the jury agreed in thinking that he had acted with great presence of mind. The jury did agree, and the Coroner added that he hoped Kelly's employers would take notice of this commendation.

At this point Bradstreet rose and asked that the inquest should be adjourned, so that an exhaustive

enquiry could be made into the exact cause of the accident. The Coroner fell in with suspicious readiness.

"You have found nothing wrong with the machinery?" he enquired.

"Nothing wrong with the dynamo itself. Still, obviously, there must be something out of order, or such an accident could not happen to an experienced man."

The Coroner then addressed the jury, saying that it was evident that the deceased man met his death from electrocution, but that at that stage they were not in a position to decide how the fatal shock came to be received; and the proceedings concluded formally with an adjournment to a date three weeks later, when the enquiries should be completed, and Jervis, an important witness, would be able to attend.

What did not come out was a piece of evidence which would at once have lifted the incident to the front page of the evening papers. Bradstreet's reply to the Coroner had been literally true. Nothing was wrong with the dynamo itself; but it had been tampered with, so that there was a leakage of current from one of the output cables to a guard rail. A narrow slot had been cut through the insulation, probably with the edge of a file. In this was jammed one end of a folding metal rule, such as is carried by many workers in wood or iron. The rule was extended to its full length, and its other end had been forced under the lower guard rail and allowed to spring back, so that it remained curved like a bow in firm contact with the bared wires below and the rail above. In Mason's opinion, and that of a consulting engineer, it was quite impossible that this could be due to an accident.

After this, Bradstreet followed one line of enquiry, Ellis another. The closest investigation of Jervis's

accounts failed to uncover any irregularity. Cole's, though unsystematic, were perfectly in order. Bradstreet, however, was able to report that Kelly had been paying attention to Cole's younger daughter, and that Jervis appeared to resent this. The girl affirmed positively that she had had nothing to do with Jervis, and the information, which at first seemed to point to hostility between Jervis and Kelly, turned out to be more of a hindrance than a help.

"I believe we can do it on what we've got," Ellis said. "I'd prefer a motive, of course, but I doubt if we'll find a sane one."

"You think it's a lunatic's work?"

"You've heard and seen the same as I have, Bradder. What do you feel?"

The West-countryman shrugged his broad shoulders.

"There'll be a motive all right," he said, "even if 'twouldn't be enough to make you or me do the deed."

Ellis suddenly smacked his fist into his palm.

"Mrs. Cole. He might have told her something the girl didn't know."

Bradstreet opened his eyes wide. He rose from the table, and ambled out of the room. When he came back, an hour later, he nodded.

"Jervis spoke to Cole about Kelly's carrying on with his daughter. Cole laughed in his face. He told Mrs. Cole it looked as if Jervis was sweet on the girl himself. Fair roared with laughter, Cole did."

"Well. What do you want now?" Jervis stared peevishly at Ellis.

For perhaps half a minute Ellis did not reply. He gazed unwaveringly at the trussed-up accountant, then slowly began to shake his head.

"You planned it neatly," he said, "but you made a mistake."

"I don't know what you mean."

"I'm afraid you do."

Ellis gave him the traditional warning. Instead of turning pale, the accountant's cheeks went crimson. He stuttered for a moment indignantly; then all the fight went from him, and he collapsed.

"My breath," he said, after a few seconds. "Can't—get my—breath."

"Don't worry. I'll just ask you questions and you can shake your head or nod. You were going to get the rule, weren't you? That's why you had the gloves on."

Jervis nodded.

"Finger-prints," he whispered. "It was worrying me. I couldn't be sure."

"No, there were no prints. But rubber gloves can make marks. Sheer bad luck, from your point of view, Kelly's tackling you like that. You weren't able to get rid of the gloves. Don't try to tell us now. We can take a statement from you when you feel better."

"I will say nothing without first consulting my solicitor."

"Capital!" Ellis assured him. "We'd all prefer that."

The statement ran as follows:

"My solicitor has persuaded me to make this statement. He thinks it will be better for me not to give evidence at my trial. He suggests I am not well enough to do myself justice. He does not think that I shall be able to make the jury see, as I saw all the time, what a menace Cole was to the firm's very existence—quite apart from his intolerable inconvenience to me. He doesn't think it would be good tactics to prove that it

wasn't my fault that the rule was left there. Yet Kelly was clearly responsible for that, as he is for my being here. Instead, he gets patted on the back for his presence of mind. Presence of mind, forsooth! Who showed any mind at all but myself? I overlooked nothing—except that a hooligan would rush to be a cheap hero at my expense.

"I foresaw every move; the current switched off, people afraid to stir in the darkness, while I, knowing every inch of the way, could slip along in the confusion to whip out the rule and get back with it safe in my pocket to Cole's body. Twenty seconds would have been ample for me. I know, because I practised and timed it often when I was working late. I used to wait till I saw the watchman cross the yard for his tea, and I knew the place was empty. Then I would go down to the engine-room, work for a few minutes with my file at the cable, carefully covering the cut with insulating tape so that it would not show; then a quick walk to and from the engine, with my watch in my hand; and back to my room, for the watchman to find me busy over my accounts.

"I took no risks. After all my preparations were made, I went to the spot half a dozen times before the right moment came. Some of the times Cole was not near the engines, or someone was standing where he would see me. Three times I got back unnoticed. And the other evening I talked with Cole. He had a stock catchword which he repeated like a parrot, until it made me almost physically sick.

"'How is H.M.S. Indispensable today?' he would ask, and bray with laughter. The man's insolence was unbearable. It had grown worse since that other matter, when I did no more than my duty by speaking to him. A girl of that age needs someone older, wiser, more

experienced. In any case, she cannot be trusted to judge for herself.

"But I thought it politic to show no resentment. I even would force a smile. I wondered what his fat jeering face would look like if he realised what my business was.

"My solicitor says that Counsel for the prosecution would make much of the fact that I wore rubber gloves, and that the jury would not believe my explanation. I cannot see why; it was a rational precaution that any prudent man would take. If I felt better, and stronger, I would have rejected his advice, and not listened to that fat red-haired detective. At least, he calls himself a detective, though I must say he does not look like one. . . ."

After this, the document rambled and became incoherent, Jervis repeating himself again and again. Whether it was due to the shock, whether the fall merely speeded up what was happening anyway, or whether he started off his balance, nobody could be sure. By the time he came up for trial, however, there was no doubt at all, and, after a brief hearing, the Judge directed that the punctilious accountant be detained during Her Majesty's pleasure.

As Ellis commented to Bradstreet, nothing makes the police more suspicious than not finding finger-prints where they would naturally expect them. The Devonian considered this remark, then nodded slowly.

"Ar," he replied.

The Killer

VIVIAN STUART

MESSITER lay on his back, his eyes fixed sightlessly on the indifferent stars, his mouth open and hideously gaping.

Denton looked down at him dispassionately and thought that he made an unpleasant corpse, for death had robbed him of all his suave charm.

Denton's gaze passed slowly from Messiter's slumped body and came to rest on the automatic which he still held in his own gloved hand. He took out a handkerchief and wiped the butt carefully. Then, grasping it by the barrel, he thrust it into Messiter's left hand, closing the clenched fingers over it, impressing the prints on butt and trigger.

Finally, he released Messiter's hand and watched as the automatic slipped an inch or so from the dead man's grasp. He studied the position of the weapon, moved it slightly and then, eyes narrowed, stood back to regard his handiwork critically.

He worked quickly and with the assured deftness of a man who knew exactly the effect he wished to create and how to set about it.

Messiter was the second man he had killed and, he thought, with some satisfaction, this time he had done the job with considerable artistry. The police could think what they liked. Medical evidence would confirm the appearance of the wounds having been self-inflicted.

Denton again studied the body but his mind was no longer solely concentrated on his task. His quick ears

had caught the sound of a tumbling stone and, when it was followed by an unmistakable grunt, he needed no second warning.

With almost feline agility he darted into the shadows and merged with them, his back pressed against the rough brickwork of the crumbling wall.

By the time he was secure in this cover, slow, measured footsteps could be heard quite plainly, approaching from the road.

The bright beam of a torch flashed across the opposite wall. Denton held his breath. It would ruin all his careful plans if he were seen here and the intruder, a blunt silhouette against the star-lit skyline, was obviously the beat policeman. He'd heard something, no doubt, and was bent on satisfying himself that all was well. The beam of his lamp played methodically over the rubble-strewn floor and Denton silently cursed his conscientiousness.

He hesitated for an instant, his brain ice-cold, his body, like a steel spring, tensed for action. The policeman grunted again as he slipped on the uneven ground and then, miraculously, the torch went out, clattering down amongst the tins and other rubbish which littered the floor of the bombed building, to land a yard from Denton's feet. He put out a stealthy hand and grasped it, stuffing it into his pocket. The policeman stumbled about looking for his lamp, swearing audibly, and Denton grinned to himself.

Clumsy oaf! Let him look for it. The noise the fellow was making was just the chance he needed. Sooner or later the man would be bound to stumble over Messiter's body and, even without a torch, he'd realise that Messiter was dead and then he'd summon assistance. And after that it would only be a matter of minutes before someone would be sent to the nearest call-box to

inform Denton that his services were required. He wanted to be back there, in his own house, when the phone call came. He didn't want his wife to answer the call, to say he was out, perhaps to make some mistake when she took the message.

Above all, *he* wanted to tell her that Messiter had killed himself. He had endured six months of torture on Messiter's account and he wanted to watch her face as he told her that her lover was dead.

Denton slid silently round the corner of the wall and was able to put fifty yards between himself and the policeman, running cat-footed in the darkness.

It paid to study the lie of the land on these occasions, he thought smugly. You learnt by experience. When he'd killed young Gilbert, it had been a bungling job, but luck had been with him and, anyway, in war-time, it was a great deal easier.

Denton reached the deserted laneway where his car was parked. Conveniently close to the rear entrance of the hospital, he had been leaving it there for weeks now, so that its presence tonight might occasion no comment.

He got into the car and, as he did so, the silence was shattered by the shrilling of a police whistle. The constable had found Messiter then. Well, he'd taken his time, he'd given Denton all the breathing space he needed. Five minutes and he'd be at home, ready and waiting for the telephone call.

He entered his own house exactly five minutes later.

Claire called to him from the drawing-room and he answered her in his normal, pleasant voice, calm and unhurried.

"Yes, my dear, I'm home at last."

She was so lovely, so desirable, Denton thought, as she rose to greet him. He seized her suddenly in his arms and began to kiss her with passionate eagerness

but, laughing, she drew away from his embrace.

"Alan dear! What's come over you?"

He controlled himself with an effort. His voice shook as he said, "I wonder if you've any idea how much I love you?"

She smiled at him, teasingly. "Why, Alan, we've been married for nearly twelve years——"

"And I'm an old man now, I suppose?" he asked bitterly. "It's time I got over being so stupidly in love with you, isn't it?"

"Nonsense, darling. You know I adore you."

She spoke lightly but her eyes were wary, Denton thought, sick with jealousy.

"Sit down, darling," Claire said. "I've made coffee."

Denton did as he was told. She gave him the coffee, placing it on a small table beside him. Just as he raised the cup to his lips the telephone rang and he jumped up, spilling the coffee in his haste.

Claire said, "It's all right, Alan, I'll go."

But he forestalled her.

His hand was trembling so that he could hardly lift the receiver and it took every ounce of self-control he possessed to say, in the hearty, reassuring tone he used for patients, "Hullo! Dr. Denton here."

"Ah, glad I was able to catch you, Doctor. Inspector Field would be obliged if you'd come and view a body for us."

Denton recognised the voice. "That's Sergeant Sharp, isn't it?"

"That's right, sir."

"What is it this time, eh?" Denton asked, trying to sound casual.

"Well, sir, it looks like suicide to me *but*——" The Sergeant hesitated. "I'm afraid it's a friend of yours, Doctor."

"Oh?" Denton licked at dry lips. He mustn't overdo his concern when Sharp told him it was Messiter. "Who is it, Sergeant?"

"Mr. Messiter, sir."

"Oh Lord! That's terrible." He was pleased with himself. He'd done that very well—distressed but controlled, just the right amount of feeling under the professional calm.

"How did he—how did he do it?"

"With a .45 automatic, Doctor. I'm sorry we have to ask you to do this for us, seeing as Mr. Messiter was a friend of yours. I tried to get hold of Dr. Smith but he's out on a baby case so——"

"That's all right," Denton cut in briskly. "I'm the police surgeon, after all. I'll be along right away, Sergeant." He slammed down the receiver and stood for a moment, mopping his brow. Heavens! Suppose they'd got Smith. That was something he'd never considered when he'd made his plans. He had taken it for granted that, as police surgeon, he would be called on to do the P.M. But luck was with him. Thank God for that baby!

He remembered to pop his head into the drawing-room on his way out.

"Sorry, Claire, it's a call from the police. I'll have to go."

She frowned. "Oh, Alan, what a shame. Bobby said he was going to look in this evening. He'll be so disappointed if you're not here."

"Bobby? What's he coming for? You never told me." There was an edge to his voice. It would be the third time this week that Bobby Grant had 'looked in'.

Claire smiled at him, "I hadn't time to tell you, Alan. Well, hurry back, won't you?"

He forced himself to return her smile. Good heavens,

was there to be no end to the torture he had to endure? Messiter had been bad enough but Bobby . . .

Denton got into his car, and mopped his brow again before backing out of the garage. The police would expect him to be upset about Messiter. It wouldn't matter if he seemed a bit shaken. They'd been great friends, he and Messiter.

Denton laughed aloud. Oh, yes, they'd been great friends!

He drove down Hill Street and pulled up beside the bombed houses. A uniformed constable saluted him.

"This way, Doctor," he said. Denton followed him.

Where Messiter lay, men were busy.

"Well, Doctor," Inspector Field greeted him. "So you found us?"

"Yes, of course. I came straight away," Denton returned. He knelt down beside Messiter. The detectives clustered round, their own work suspended whilst he made his examination. He took his time.

The Inspector watched him, saying nothing.

Denton got to his feet at last.

"Poor devil!" he said. "All right, as far as I'm concerned, you can move him."

The Inspector nodded to the ambulance men.

"What could he have been doing here?" Denton said, looking about him with simulated bewilderment. "It's a ghastly place to choose. I wonder what made him do it?"

The Inspector glanced at him quickly. "You think he shot himself then, Doctor?"

"I shouldn't think there's any doubt of it, Inspector," Denton asserted.

"H'm. The gun was by his left hand."

"Yes. He was left-handed, you know."

"Was he? I didn't know."

They went together to the parked cars and the Inspector said abruptly, "Perhaps you wouldn't mind coming along to the station before you do the P.M., Doctor? Seeing he was a friend of yours we'd be grateful for any information you can give us."

"Yes, of course, Inspector," Denton managed. "Any of your chaps like a lift?"

They piled into the cars. Denton found a young, fresh-faced constable beside him.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"P.C. Noakes, sir," was the diffident reply. "I found the—er—the body, sir."

Denton regarded him with interest. So this was the clumsy devil who had nearly wrecked his carefully thought-out scheme!

"Oh?" He said it without a tremor. "How did you do that, eh?"

He listened in silence to the constable's account, relieved that the lad hadn't seen or heard anything whilst he was hunting for his lamp. Hell, he'd forgotten the lamp! It was still in his pocket. He'd have to get rid of it as soon as he'd finished at the police station.

Denton went into the Inspector's office, making a fine show of impatience.

He intercepted a quick glance which passed between the Inspector and Sergeant Sharp and, involuntarily, he tensed. Good lord, they were only country louts, the two of them, he'd nothing to fear from them. He answered the Inspector's questions briefly and lucidly, admitting, with easy frankness, that Messiter had been on friendly terms with both himself and his wife. He implied, very obliquely, that Claire's friendship with the younger man had been one of which he had thoroughly approved, yet the Inspector did not

seem quite satisfied and continued to press the point until Denton began to get annoyed.

"What exactly are you getting at, Inspector?" he blustered. "This is a clear case of suicide and——"

The Inspector shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't agree with you, Doctor. I think it was—murder."

Denton stared at him blankly. "Are you inferring that I don't know my job?" he demanded.

"No, sir, not that. But——" The Inspector rose to his feet, suddenly stern and menacing.

Denton paled. "I'll have to go," he said desperately. "Have you any more questions to ask me?"

"Yes, sir, I have. Just one."

"Well?"

"How did you know where to find Mr. Messiter's body tonight, Dr. Denton?"

Denton lost his temper then. "Why, you fool, I was sent for! Your own Sergeant phoned me and asked me to come out——"

"Yes, sir, I know." The Inspector was calm. "But you see, he didn't tell you where to come, now, did he? You rang off before he got the chance! And yet you came straight out . . ."

Denton turned like a flash towards the door but found Sergeant Sharp was leaning against it, his broad face hard and unsmiling.

The Dupe

JULIAN SYMONS

THERE was a good deal of argument about the justice of the verdict when Evelyn Ellis was found guilty but insane. It is not likely, anyway, that she would have been hanged; but, curiously enough, it was the particular person Evelyn chose to kill, and the first words she spoke to the police afterwards, that influenced the jury most strongly in reaching their verdict. And so Evelyn Ellis spent the last fifteen years of her life in Broadmoor, where she sang old-fashioned sentimental songs and developed considerable skill in loom-weaving, turning out a quite remarkable variety of scarves and table-runners. It is very likely that, with the exception of the few days to be described in this story, those were the happiest years of her life.

In the forty-five years before she went to Broadmoor Evelyn Ellis had had little cause for singing. Her father died when she was six years old; he had been a partner in a shipping agency, and left to his widow a share in this business which was sufficient to keep her and the children in reasonable comfort. It did so for a few years until Ellis's partner, who had been carrying on the agency single-handed, went abroad in a hurry. He had always been perfectly charming to Mrs. Ellis, and the revelation that he had been diverting large sums of money from the agency to his private use profoundly shocked her. She was at first too dazed to appreciate fully the change in her circumstances from prosperity to sharp poverty; when she finally understood that life

held for her no prospect but that of finding some kind of job to keep herself and her two daughters, Mrs. Ellis took an overdose of veronal. She left a letter to her sister Lavinia, with whom she had quarrelled bitterly several years before, begging her to provide for the education of Evelyn and Agnes.

Aunt Lavinia did her best for the children after her fashion, which was that of the hard-headed wife of a hard-headed wholesaler in cotton goods. She paid for their education at a shabby-genteel private school, where they learned very little and were rather poorly fed. They stayed at school during most holidays; for Aunt Lavinia, who had intensely disliked her woolly-minded sister, had no particular desire to see her sister's children. It was at school, during holiday time, that the incident occurred which marked Evelyn's whole life. She was fourteen years old and her sister was twelve when Evelyn playfully pushed Agnes, as they stood at the head of the stairs leading to the school library. Agnes slipped, fell down the dozen stairs to the bottom, and lay there laughing at her sister and saying that she could not get up. Agnes had, in fact, fractured her spine. She lay on her back for many months, seen, probed at and discussed by a variety of doctors who were, as Aunt Lavinia told the sisters more than once, a great expense. The months developed into years, and gradually it was understood and accepted by everybody, including Agnes herself, that she would never walk normally again. She was not completely helpless, for with the aid of sticks she was able to walk a few steps to a chair where she half-sat, half-lay, but anything like a normal life was impossible for her.

Perhaps it seems strange that the effect of the accident was to bind the sisters more closely together. Agnes apparently felt no resentment for the push that

had turned her from a healthy, laughing girl into a cripple. Evelyn, on the other hand, felt a burden of guilt about her sister that could never be removed. Her life was dedicated to making Agnes happy. When she took a secretarial job in London Agnes came with her to share the tiny flat in suburban Balham which was all she could afford. Before leaving for work every day Evelyn made her own and Agnes's breakfast, and helped her sister to dress. During the daytime Agnes sat in a chair by their first-floor window and watched what went on in the street. She became a well-known figure in the neighbourhood as she waved gaily and called a greeting to children, tradesmen and neighbours. The landlady, Mrs. Norton, who cooked midday dinner every day and brought it up to Agnes, was full of admiration for her cheerfulness. "Your sister is wonderful, Miss Evelyn," she used to say. "Always merry and bright." And indeed Agnes was always smiling and had a beautiful fresh complexion, in contrast to Evelyn whose face was sallow, and who wore a perpetually harassed look.

When Evelyn was twenty-eight she met an elderly man named Edward Ryan, who worked in the accounts department of the insurance company in which she was a secretary. Ryan took her out half a dozen times, to theatres and dances, and twice to dinner. On these evenings, of course, Agnes was left alone, although Mrs. Norton came up to have a chat with her. Agnes asked her sister quietly whether she had had a nice time, but her high colour was a little higher and her bright eyes a little brighter than usual when Evelyn returned home. On the second occasion when Edward Ryan took Evelyn to dinner, one of the fears about her sister that haunted Evelyn became a reality. In walking, with the aid of sticks, from bed to chair, Agnes had slipped and

fallen. She had been badly shaken, although she had managed to get back to bed. All this Agnes told Evelyn, her bright eyes fixed with unwavering intensity upon her sister's face. Afterwards Evelyn whispered a guilty "Yes" to her sister's questions about having a nice time. The next day she told Edward Ryan that she could not go out with him any more, and shortly afterwards she found another job.

In those days Evelyn still had a kind of anxious prettiness of which nothing remained in the gaunt, sallow woman who seventeen years later stood in the dock on a charge of murder. At the time of her trial Evelyn was employed as assistant in Mr. Pettigrew's antiquarian bookshop just off Piccadilly. Mr. Pettigrew was a second cousin of Aunt Lavinia, who had positively cast off the sisters when Evelyn refused to consider the idea that Agnes would be better off in a nursing home. Mr. Pettigrew said that he gave Evelyn a job because he was sorry for her, but he may have kept her on because she typed his letters and kept his books for a smaller salary than he would have had to pay anybody else. She had no specialised knowledge of books, but that was not very important, for she was only left in charge of the shop between four and six o'clock. Just before four o'clock each day, after drinking his cup of afternoon tea, plump, neat little Mr. Pettigrew went home. He always made the same joke when he left. "Remember you are the guardian of my treasures, Miss Ellis," he said. "If anybody tries to take them from you, just show them Jessie." Jessie was the old revolver, a relic of Mr. Pettigrew's service in the First World War, tucked away in a drawer at the back of the shop. But not many customers came in between four and six o'clock, and although a few of them were rather odd, there was never any need to show them Jessie.

For that matter, although Mr. Pettigrew had some handsome sets of standard authors in finely-tooled bindings, his bookshop did not contain such wonderful treasures as all that—not like the jeweller's next door, with its half-dozen clasps, necklaces and single stones discreetly displayed on velvet behind steel-barred windows. Evelyn always lingered to look at the jeweller's window after shutting the shop and saying good night to Williams, the night watchman of the bank on the other side of Pettigrew's, who also included the jeweller's and the bookshop in his nightly round. Williams came on duty a few minutes before Evelyn left at night, and he used often to watch her looking into the jeweller's window. At such times her lips moved, although no sound could be heard—an odd and uncomfortable habit which had been noticed by Mr. Pettigrew. The little bookseller had also observed that Evelyn had begun to read voraciously the kind of love stories that are generally bought by teen-age shop girls. She also appeared at the bookshop one day with some clumsily-applied lipstick on her mouth.

Middle-aged spinsters do tend, however, to odd ideas and habits, as plump Mr. Pettigrew commented to his wife, and there was nothing wrong with Evelyn's work. Probably she would have gone on working for Mr. Pettigrew and looking after Agnes until the end of her life, if it had not been for Millie Hanslet, who took a room on the ground floor of the house in Balham. Millie Hanslet was a brass-haired, loud-voiced fiftyish woman who said that she lived on a small annuity and a widow's pension for her husband, who had been killed in Africa during the war. Millie came up sometimes in the evening to have a cup of tea with the Ellises, and to bemoan quite frankly the absence of men in her life. "A woman needs a man," she said. "I mean

someone to go about with, take her to the pictures, buy ice-cream. Isn't that so?"

"I don't know," said Agnes coldly, from her chair by the window.

Millie Hanslet gave a great wink at Evelyn, who smiled back at her uncertainly. "And *I'm* going to get a man," she added. "You see."

When Millie had gone downstairs Agnes said, "She's vulgar."

"Yes, I suppose so," Evelyn sighed. Then she began to get supper.

Four days late Millie Hanslet came upstairs and produced triumphantly a small snap of a flashily handsome young man with a moustache, and trilby hat worn on one side. "That's my beau."

Agnes hardly looked at it. Evelyn said excitedly, "How did you meet him?"

"Pen Friends Unlimited," Millie said triumphantly. Evelyn merely looked mystified. Millie explained: "It's only five shillings to join and then they give you names of half a dozen gentlemen and give them *your* name and you write to each other and exchange photographs and if you want to meet each other you do. Here's the leaflet." Evelyn took it automatically. Her eyes were still on the photograph in Millie's hand.

Later that evening Agnes said, "My back hurts. I think I'll go to bed now." Evelyn helped her sister into bed. Agnes's face, round and almost youthful by the side of Evelyn's, was anxious. "You're not going to write to those pen friend people, are you?"

"Of course not," Evelyn said, and hoped that she sounded convincing. She wrote next day, using the address of Pettigrew's Bookshop. There was no danger of Mr. Pettigrew seeing the reply, because Evelyn was always there first to open the post. When writing,

Evelyn took eight years off her age, calling herself thirty-seven. She described herself as fair-haired and vivacious, said that she was fond of good books, good music and the theatre, and wanted to correspond with a gentleman under forty who had similar interests. She received a reply by return post, which she opened with trembling fingers. It was a short letter which thanked her for her postal order, and said that her name had been put on the register of Pen Friends Unlimited. She would realise that most gentlemen under forty were interested in meeting ladies younger than themselves, but her name had been passed to two or three possible pen friends who might be interested.

Two days later the letter came. It began 'Dear Pen-Friend Evelyn' and was signed 'Yours very sincerely, Colin (Jameson)'. The writer of the letter said that he was thirty-three years old, and liked the older and more sensible type of woman. "These modern flappers with their painted faces and painted toe-nails drive me to distraction," the letter said. "I don't want the woman of my choice to be a frump, but I do want her to have some ideas beyond paint and powder." He enclosed a photograph which showed a rather ruggedly determined-looking man with thick eyebrows and dark hair growing low over his forehead. He did not look much more than thirty years old.

Evelyn read the letter a dozen times. She had a number of photographs taken in her only recent frock, and selected one from them which, if looked at with a friendly eye, made her look no more than forty. She was hardly prepared, however, for the enthusiasm with which he received it. "I loved your innocent look," he wrote in the firm upright hand she looked for now every day in the post. "And the beautiful spirit that shows in the features. But you must have deceived me about

your age. I believe you are younger than I am." The correspondence flourished. Colin ("You must call me Colin and I shall call you Evelyn", he wrote in his second letter) worked as foreman in a large engineering works in North London, on night shift from seven o'clock in the evening until three a.m. He had been left an orphan at the age of eleven—rather like herself, Evelyn thought—and had then been brought up by a foster-mother. He had worked since he was fourteen. "I have to admit that I'm not really an educated man," he wrote, and she loved his frankness. He had married when he was twenty-two, but after three years of unhappy bickering had discovered his wife's unfaithfulness, and divorced her. "It was foolish of me, dear Evelyn, but this experience turned me against all women for a time. Can you understand that? I think you can, for I believe you have a great knowledge of human nature." He told her that her letters meant a great deal in the life of a lonely man.

The effect of this correspondence on Evelyn was remarkable. A spirit and gaiety came back into her face that had not been there for years. At the bookshop Mr. Pettigrew commented on her cheerfulness, and at home Agnes looked at her with an enquiring eye, although she said nothing. When, however, Millie Hanslet asked if Evelyn had written to Pen Friends Unlimited she received a curt negative answer. Evelyn Ellis was bemused by the correspondence, but there remained one small shadow of doubt in the fiery dreams of happiness that occupied her every day. It seemed that with Colin working on night shift all the time they would never meet, and sometimes she feared that he must be unreal, or that some old, old man was playing a cruel joke on her. When Colin wrote that he longed for a meeting, she still felt some doubt of him, for he

added that on Saturday and Sunday he always went down to see his foster-mother who was bedridden and lived at an Old Peoples' Home near Dorking. "The old lady hasn't much longer in this world," he wrote, "and you wouldn't want me to neglect her." Evelyn was not suspicious, but she couldn't help feeling that there was something odd about the fact that they could never meet, and when he daringly suggested that he should come to the bookshop one day after Mr. Pettigrew had gone home she half-expected to get a letter the next morning with an elaborate excuse for his absence.

But he came. The door opened and he stood there, dark, square and robust, his eyes looking quickly round the shop and then settling on her, his mouth smiling. Nobody else was in the shop. She ran forward to him.

"You've come."

"Did you think I wouldn't?" His voice was deep, and in anyone else it might have appeared to her rather common. "I'd have known you anywhere," he said, and added quickly, "We can't talk here. What about coming out to tea?"

She fairly gaped at him. "But I've told you—you know I can't——"

"Why not? What the eye doesn't see the heart doesn't grieve over, as they say. You told me yourself not many people come in after four."

She hesitated, but only for a moment. Relief at finding that he really existed, that Fate had not played a cruel trick on her, swamped all other feelings. They went to a little teashop that he knew and Evelyn talked as she had not talked for years. She told him about her childhood and the family misfortunes, and for the first time mentioned her sister vaguely, without saying that she was an invalid. Colin did not say very much, but

he was a good listener and occasionally he squeezed her hand. All too soon he looked at his watch and said that he must go to work. He held her hands at parting. "You'll be here tomorrow."

"I can't," she said weakly. "I oughtn't to shut the shop."

He dropped her hands. "I thought you were sincere about wanting to see me, but perhaps you just don't care."

"Oh, I do, I do."

"Well then, if you want to see me like I want to see you——"

"All right," Evelyn said. She felt faint with joy at his eagerness, she would have agreed to anything. "I'll be here."

His face lit up, he smiled charmingly. "That's my girl. Just after four tomorrow." In the public street he kissed her good-bye.

That night Agnes guessed the truth that Evelyn, in her happiness, hardly attemped to hide. "You've met a man," Evelyn, humming a tune under her breath, said nothing. "Is it through that beastly Pen Club?"

"And if it is?"

"Then he's up to no good. There's something he wants from you."

Evelyn laughed and turned round. "Do you think he's after me for my money or my looks?" she asked, but there was no bitterness in her voice. Then the flood of her happiness spilled over. "Oh, Agnes, he's so handsome, so attractive. Not quite—not quite our sort, you know, but what does that matter?"

Agnes stared incredulously at the photograph so proudly displayed by her sister. "He must be years younger than you are. In some way or other he's fooling you, he's duping you."

"What way?"

Agnes shook her head. "I don't know, but there's something. You're a dupe, Evie, a dupe. In some way he's using you for a purpose of his own."

"Agnes! It's just that he likes me. He needn't have met me unless he'd wanted to. He's very lonely, he wants company——"

"Does he want it enough to put up with the two of us?" Agnes's voice was high. "Have you told him about me? Or are you just going to leave me to—look after myself?"

The light in Evelyn's face faded. "You know I should never do that."

"And does *he* know it? Have you told him that you've got a crippled sister dependent on you?" Agnes's smooth face was almost ugly as she said, "You'd see that would soon make him change his tune about marriage."

"For heaven's sake, Agnes, there's no question of marriage. Why, I only met him today for the first time."

"You just tell him about your sister, that's all."

Evelyn and Colin met the next day, and the next, but they did not speak of Agnes. The hands of the watch crawled round each day until they reached four o'clock, Mr. Pettigrew made his little joke about his treasures and Jessie, and within five minutes of his departure she was running—yes, positively running—to the teashop where they met, without sparing so much as a glance for the jeweller's next door. He was always there, waiting for her—one day when she was five minutes late he looked quite anxious—and he always made some comment on her appearance, and told her how much her friendship meant to him. They talked, or she talked and he listened, and at a quarter-past six each day he left her to go off to work. He was not a gentleman,

there could be no doubt of that, but then he made no pretence to be one, and that she felt counted in his favour. On Wednesday she said to him, "I have my half-day off tomorrow."

He looked quite startled. "Do you?"

She said shyly, "I could meet you early—at one o'clock—if you'd like to."

"Well, I don't know. I never knew you had a half-day off on Thursday." He said this almost in a tone of annoyance. There was a pause. Then came the sudden smile that charmed her, and he said, "We'll go to Richmond. What about that?" And at Richmond on the river next day Colin told her again that he was a lonely man and asked if she would consider marriage.

"Oh, Colin." They kissed. Then she remembered. She must tell him about Agnes. It would be a kind of a test, she told herself with a sinking heart, it would show whether his feeling for her was sincere. "I've got something to tell you. I want you to look away while I'm saying it."

He took her hands. Beneath the thick brows his eyes were wary. "Here here, what's all this about?"

"Look away from me." He looked into the water, trailing one hand in it, while she told him the story of her sister, confessed the guilt she had always felt, told him of the terrible dream she had had night after night for years in which Agnes, calm and smiling, floated rather than fell down an endless flight of steps with her dress ballooning out like a parachute, and then lay crumpled like a spider at the bottom. All the while he listened with his face turned away as she had asked, his hand trailing in the water. At the end she said, "So you see I could never leave her," and knew it was a lie, knew that if he asked her to do it she would leave Agnes and go with him.

But he did not ask her. He took his hand out of the water and smiled at her. "Is that all? I thought you had something terrible to tell me."

"You mean it's all right? Agnes can come and live with us?"

"Of course. You don't suppose I'd turn your sister away."

"*Oh, Colin.*" Words were inadequate to express what she felt. It was as though she were living within a beautiful rose-coloured bubble where everything that she wished for came true. She told Agnes, who was pleased but still suspicious. "You must bring him round to see me," she said, and Evelyn promised exultantly that she would. She went downstairs to share her happiness with Millie Hanslet, but Millie Hanslet, Mrs. Norton said, had been called away suddenly to her sick mother at Birmingham and had taken all her possessions with her.

That was Thursday. On Friday and Saturday she saw him again, and on the following Monday the inevitable happened. A customer who had come round at five o'clock on Saturday and found the shop closed had telephoned to Mr. Pettigrew about it. Evelyn made stumbling, confused excuses about her sister, and Mr. Pettigrew said sharply that this must not happen again, or else. Or else what he did not say, but Evelyn could imagine. That day she did not go to meet Colin, and at half-past four he came to the shop. A customer was there and Colin glowered at the books until the man had gone. Then he turned on her, and she felt the blast of his anger, withering her precious happiness. She appealed to him. What would happen if she lost her job? He snarled at her then—really there was no other word for it—that he had already promised to look after her and her precious sister. What more did she

want? Then his tone changed suddenly and he talked to her gently, earnestly, persuasively. There was no other time at which they could meet, he said. Didn't she want to see him, as much as he wanted to see her? His dark head was very close to hers, his lips whispered the reassuring words she had always wanted to hear.

Evelyn met him on Tuesday, and again on Wednesday, when she took him home to meet Agnes. Evelyn had made scones and a jam sponge in advance, and she was a little distressed because Colin did not eat very much. She and Agnes made most of the conversation. Colin was pleasant enough, but he seemed to find the occasion a strain.

"Did you like Agnes?" she asked when she was seeing him on to the bus.

"Eh? Yes, she's all right. Bad luck for her, being an invalid like that."

"You won't mind living with her?"

"No," he said as if with an effort. "No, I shan't mind."

"Tomorrow's my half-day."

Again he seemed to be making an effort. "So it is. What would you like to do, eh?"

"You'll think I'm foolish, but—I've never seen the Tower of London."

"Tower of London?" He stared at her incredulously. "I thought only kids went there."

Something in his manner upset her, and she almost gabbled. "Oh, we won't go if you don't want to, of course, we'll do anything you like, perhaps it's foolish, it was just that I hadn't seen it——"

"Here, here." He stopped her with a laugh. "Of course we can go there if you want to. I was just a bit surprised, that's all."

Evelyn was almost in tears. "But you said only kids——"

"Now then," he said. "Don't pick me up on everything I say. You're beginning to think you're the wife already."

The bus came. He kissed her, looked at her for a fraction of a second longer than usual, and then jumped on it quickly.

When Evelyn got back home she asked eagerly, "Did you like him?"

Agnes said hesitantly, "I think you ought to be careful, Evie. You don't know anything about him really, do you?"

"I know he's in love with me." Agnes remained silent. Evelyn's voice had a hysterical note in it. "He loves me enough to be prepared to live with you. What more do you want?"

"Nothing, Evie," her sister answered with quite unaccustomed meekness. "I want you to be happy."

The first blow fell on Thursday morning. Mr. Pettigrew reached the shop early for once, and confronted her with an expression of extraordinary grimness. Evelyn had been unlucky. The persistent man who had paid a visit before when the shop was shut had come three times between half-past four and six on Wednesday afternoon. Evelyn had no chance to invent a story, even had she been capable of it. Mr. Pettigrew spoke of vipers in his bosom, of deceit and idleness and the modern worker. She was to leave at the end of the week.

The second blow fell at lunch-time. She was to meet Colin at one o'clock at their teashop, and it was half-past before Evelyn began to understand that he might not be coming. She stayed in the teashop until two o'clock and then wandered out, looking so pale that the

woman in charge of it asked if she would like some brandy. All sorts of wild thoughts moved through her mind. Perhaps they had agreed to meet at the Tower itself, perhaps he had been called suddenly to do a day-time shift, perhaps he was ill or hurt. Never for a moment did she admit that he might have broken their appointment deliberately. At last she took a bus to Holloway and found 133 Bossom Street, the address from which he had written the letters that she cherished. It was a small tobacconist's shop, an accommodation address for receiving letters, and they had not seen Mr. Jameson for the past two or three days. At half-past five Evelyn returned to the flat in Balham, hoping that there might be news of him. There was none. Agnes tried to comfort her. "We still have each other," she said. Evelyn shuddered.

When Evelyn left on Friday morning to go to work she met the postman and asked, without hope, if there were any letters for her. There *was* a letter, in the familiar firm, upright hand. Her heart leapt. She tore the letter open on the bus with eager, fumbling fingers, and while she read the words seemed to jump before her eyes. The words said that they could not meet again for reasons which she would soon understand, and that she should not take the affair too much to heart. The letter ended, "I am very sorry it has to be this way, but when I saw you with your sister I realised that your place is really with her and that, even if the right man turns up, you could never marry and leave her. *I hope you can forget that you ever saw me.*" It was signed simply 'Colin'.

At the bookshop a grave Mr. Pettigrew awaited her, and with him a lean, kindly man named Inspector Ballard. Evelyn felt like someone walking through a thick mist as the Inspector explained that last night the

jeweller's shop next door had been robbed, and thirty thousand pounds' worth of stones stolen, and that the night watchman had been stunned and gagged. Nor did she understand in the least what was being implied when the Inspector told her of the ingenious method employed, of how down in the basement sufficient of the brickwork in the wall separating the bookseller's store-room from the disused basement below the jeweller's shop had been removed to allow the thieves to go through, and how from this basement they had avoided the jeweller's burglar alarm system by knocking away the basement ceiling, cutting through the floorboards and going through into the shop upstairs. It was a neat job, the Inspector said almost admiringly, and of course it needed some sort of co-operation. Or deception, he added with his kindly gaze on Evelyn, or deception. Because it took a good many hours' work to go through that wall, and they wouldn't have dared to do it while she was above them because she would have heard, and they couldn't have done it at night because of the watchman making his rounds. It seemed a fair puzzle, the Inspector said, until they discovered from one of the jeweller's assistants that Mr. Pettigrew's shop had been shut from four o'clock onwards during the last few days. A few minutes after four a van had been noticed on at least two occasions drawing up, two men had got out with armfuls of books, opened the door of Mr. Pettigrew's shop and gone in. The books were a blind, of course, although they would have been useful in case of questioning. The men had put in a couple of hours' work on the basement brickwork and then left before the night watchman came on duty, no doubt roughly replacing the brickwork and covering it with a screen of books. It was simple, the Inspector said, when you knew how.

All this time Evelyn said nothing, but simply twisted her hands together around the bag that contained the letter in the firm upright handwriting. When the Inspector put his questions about where she had been on those days, gently at first, then sharply and finally with downright anger, she simply said that she had gone out each day, she did not know where. It is doubtful, indeed, if any of his questions touched the simple conviction occupying her mind, that she must keep faith with the man who had shown her a glimpse of what life might be like, and had then left her because he thought her place was really with Agnes. She did not flinch when he showed her the book of photographs, turning the pages slowly and telling her something of the villainous history of this man or that one before asking if she had ever seen them. Not by a flicker of one of her red-rimmed eyelids did she show recognition when he turned to a photograph that showed Colin and Millie Hanslet together and explained that this one's real name was James Johnson, that he called himself Jones or Johns or James or Jameson, that he had been imprisoned more than once for running, with the help of the woman, friendship clubs that were a cloak for blackmail, and that he was often used as a contact man by crooks more important than himself. She remembered the last words of the letter, *I hope you can forget that you ever saw me*, and she let the Inspector turn the page. When the Inspector at last abandoned his questioning for the time being, in desperation at his inability to break down the barrier of her indifference or ignorance, Evelyn Ellis knew what she must do to preserve her soul alive, as she put it at the trial. She went to the back of the shop to wash her hands, she slipped Jessie out of the drawer into her handbag; she said good-bye calmly to Mr. Pettigrew, and then she

went home and shot her sleeping sister Agnes through the head. When the police came, Evelyn Ellis made a statement, simple and to her quite satisfactory. "I had to do it, you see," she said. "While she was alive I could never get married."

Dinner for Two

ROY VICKERS

TODAY, if you were to mention the Ennings mystery, you would be assured that 'everyone knows' that Dennis Yawle murdered Charles Ennings. In this case, 'everyone' happens to be right, though for the wrong reasons. The public of the day decided that he was guilty because he denounced an attractive young woman of pleasing manners and respectability. And 'everyone knows' that nice young women don't commit murder, whatever their walk in life, and that self-centred, solitary, aggressive little men sometimes do.

Charles Ennings was a patent agent. He lived in a flat on the third floor at Barslade Mansions, Westminster, the kind of flats that are occupied by moderately successful professional men and junior directors. A bachelor, with a promiscuous impulse freely indulged, he nevertheless managed to avoid scandalising his neighbours.

His dead body was found in his sitting-room by the daily help at eight-thirty. Death, which had occurred upwards of ten hours previously, had been caused by a knife-thrust in the throat—an ordinary pocket-knife such as could then be bought in any cutler's for a few shillings. The news, of course, did not appear before the lunch-time editions.

Dennis Yawle, the murderer, was a prematurely embittered man of thirty-two. He had taken a science degree in chemistry and had been employed by a well-

known firm of soap manufacturers for the last nine years at a modest salary. His personality, rather than his science, had precluded him from promotion. The firm had given him a chance as manager of their depot in the Balkans; but he disappointed them in everything except his routine work. Incidentally, it was in the Balkans that he had learned how to use a knife for purposes other than the cutting of string.

In chemistry alone he was enterprising. He had worked out some useful little compounds, unconnected with soap, and had patented them through Ennings. His income had been substantially increased, but not to the point where he could prudently resign his job.

He believed that Ennings had tricked him over his patents, which was true. He believed that he had lost Aileen Daines because he had insufficient money—which may have been true. Hysteria was added to grievance by the further belief that Ennings himself had enjoyed the lady's favours for a brief period before discarding her for another, which was probably an exaggeration. By that particular exaggeration many a man has been flicked from hatred to murderous intent.

Daily at lunch-time he would emerge from the laboratory in North London with his colleague, Holldon. Holldon had his daily bet on the races, and always bought a paper from a stand outside the restaurant. He would prop it up during lunch, while Yawle generally read a book. But on January 18th, 1933, he brought no book, because he had to stage a little pantomime with Holldon's paper.

First, he must eat his lunch, which was not too easy. When the coffee arrived he delivered his line, which began with a yawn:

"Any news in that thing?"

"No. They've had to plug a murder to fill space."

Holldon was doing everything right, even to pushing the paper across the table. Yawle's stage business with the paper was easy enough.

"Good—*lord!*" He shot it out, and Holldon was sufficiently startled to attend. "I know this chap who's been murdered. I say, Holldon, this is pretty ghastly for me! I was with him last evening—I must ring the police."

"I'd keep out of it, if I were you. You have to turn up at court day after day in case they want you to give evidence."

"But they've called in Scotland Yard, which means that the local police can't produce a suspect." Yawle kept it up until the other professed himself convinced.

Five minutes later he was speaking on the telephone to Chief Inspector Karslake, giving particulars of himself.

"I was at that flat last night between seven and half-past. I don't suppose I can tell you anything you don't know but I thought I'd better give you a ring."

Karslake thanked him with some warmth, and said he would send a man to Mr. Yawle's office.

"Well-l, I have rather a crowded afternoon in front of me. I could make Scotland Yard in about twenty minutes. If you could see me then, we could get my little bit tidied up right away."

In his pocket was a crystal of cyanide to complete the tidying-up process if necessary.

To walk up to the tiger and stroke it was a desperate improvisation, necessitated by the blunders of an ill-designed murder. Indeed, it is doubtful whether his plans had ever emerged from the fantasy stage, until he struck the blow—if we except the solitary precaution of observing the porter's movements.

For three nights previously he had strolled past the flats on the opposite side of the road, noting that between seven and eight the porter was extremely busy—with three entrances and forty-five flats, most of whose tenants were arriving or departing by taxi or car. It would be child's play to slip in—and out again—without being seen.

In the fantasy, he eluded the porter, passed through an empty hall, ascended an empty staircase.

In actuality, he did elude the porter. But the hall was not empty. In the miniature lounge, consisting of one palm, a radiator, and three chairs, stood a girl who, as he fancied, bore some resemblance to Aileen Daines. That is, she was neither tall nor short; she was slim and dark, with regular features and liberal eyebrows. She glanced at the electric clock, sat down and began to sort her shopping parcels. Yawle looked straight into her eyes, but she took no notice of him, which, irrationally, inflamed his sense of the loss of Aileen.

The staircase, too, contributed its quota of trouble. Most people used the automatic lift—that was why he had chosen the staircase. On the first turn, between floors, he all but crashed into an elderly lady from behind: it was such a near thing that she dropped a parcel.

He was himself startled and at a loss. The woman, small but imposing, fiftyish, glared at him with an indignation that had a quality of voraciousness—to his nerve-racked fancy, she looked as if she wanted to pounce upon him, spiderwise, and eat him.

"I'm most awfully sorry, madam! Very careless of me! I hope I didn't frighten you."

The voracious, spiderlike quality vanished from a face which was ordinary enough and even pleasing.

She accepted the parcel with a graceful, old-fashioned bow and the kind of smile that used to go with the bow.

He hurried on to the first floor—up the next flight, to the second.

"I say! Do you know you really *lose* time when you do two stairs at once?"

The thin, piping treble had come from a boy of about ten.

"Do I? Pr'aps you're right. I'll take your advice."

This was a nightmare journey. The murder, still in part a fantasy, receded. Funny how that girl had reminded him of Aileen! Must have been like her, in a way. But that girl was sure of herself and happy. If only he could know what had happened to Aileen!

The device of writing to her parents to inquire had not occurred to him. By the time he reached the third floor, Aileen's present condition was deplorable and even unmentionable—as a result of the general behaviour of Charles Ennings.

When Ennings opened the door he was wearing a dinner jacket, which somehow made everything worse. He seemed younger than his fifty years: the heavy lips had become masterful: he had pulled himself in, probably with corsets. He looked successful, confident, insolent.

"I want to talk to you, Ennings."

"By all means!" Ennings was unenthusiastic, if not positively damp. "Between ourselves, I don't do business at home, but—come in, won't you?"

The hall was but a bulge in the corridor of the flat. Opposite were two doors some ten feet apart. Ennings opened one and Yawle entered the kind of near-luscious sitting-room he had expected, littered with cabinet photographs of the current inamorata—not even attractive, in Yawle's eyes.

The telephone rang, as if to emphasise that Yawle's presence was an intrusion.

"No, it was a washout," said Ennings into the receiver. "I got home at the usual time after all, and I'm taking an evening off. Can't talk now. I have a client who's in a hurry."

Ennings cut off. He pointed to an arm-chair, but Yawle remained standing. Ennings sat in the other arm-chair.

"Gronston's," said Yawle, "have put my Cleanser in every grocer's, and every oil shop and every hardware store in the country. And it's selling."

"Of course it's selling! It's a damn fine fluid, old man. Who's saying it isn't!"

"Why do I get such measly royalties? Why is the contract signed by Lanberry's instead of by Gronston's?"

"So that's what's biting you!" Ennings had had this conversation, in one form or another, with a good many inventors. "Between ourselves, Lanberry's is a holding company, if you know what that means——"

"I know that Lanberry's *holds* one desk in one room in a back street off Holborn. And I know that the Chairman is a clerk employed by you. I've been there."

"You've been there!" snorted Ennings. "So it only remains for the bloodsucking financier to burst into tears and disgorge the loot! My good young man, you're poking your nose into things you don't understand—and you're making an infernal fool of yourself."

The main purpose, of course, was to talk about Aileen. Yawle had given no detailed thought to the matter of the royalties. Ennings and his dinner-jacket —successful, confident, insolent—was riding him.

"I shall take it up with Gronston's! There's another thing——"

"Good! I hope you'll be fool enough to do just that.

In the meantime you can take yourself and your business to the devil. Your business! Your *invention!* Between ourselves, there are a good few others who've rediscovered that old formula, or copied it out of a back number——"

So, in the end, Aileen's name hadn't even been mentioned.

The skill of the Balkan bandits with their short knives —very like our pocket knives—is based on a knowledge of how to hold the knife. If you hold it properly, as Yawle did, in the palm of the hand, you leave no fingerprints on the haft. Your index finger lies along the back of the blade, slides down it as the blade impacts with an upward sweep: so there's no detectable fingerprint there, either. If your aim is accurate, as Yawle's was, there is neither bother nor noise in the killing.

Ennings remained sitting in his arm-chair as he had sat in life.

If all the movements were performed correctly, there should be no stains. Yawle studied himself in the mirror. There were no stains. The brainstorm, the moment of hysteria, had passed, leaving him cool, tingling with a sense of achievement and well-being: He felt successful, confident, insolent.

He noted that Ennings's electric clock registered seven twenty-three. He had been in the flat for less than six minutes, all told.

He shut the door of the sitting-room. He was halfway to the front door when he heard footsteps on the landing. He backed away from the front door, found himself opposite the room next to that of the sitting-room. The dining-room. He opened the door.

The footsteps died away. The light from the corridor of the flat had fallen on a white tablecloth. Using

his sleeve, he switched on the room light.

The table was laid for two, and the food was on the table. Cold food. Smoked salmon; chicken; trifle in fairy glasses, with a peach on top—canned peach! So Ennings had been expecting a girl! Who might turn up at any minute!

Yawle was in the act of opening the front door, was reaching forward for the latch, when he again heard footsteps approaching. This time he did not panic. He merely stood back, so that his shadow should not fall on the glass panel.

This time the footsteps stopped outside the door. The knocker was lifted and discreetly applied. Yawle kept still. In due course, people go away when there is no response to a knock.

But this caller did not go away. There came the unmistakable sound of a latchkey being inserted.

There was no time to rush back to the dining-room. He slipped into the sitting-room, locked himself in with the dead man, turning the key with his handkerchief.

He did not hear the outer door of the flat being shut. For a moment he was ready to believe that his overtaut nerves had tricked him—that there had been no footsteps and no latchkey.

Some ten seconds later there came a light knock on the door of the sitting-room. Then the handle was turned. Yawle held his breath.

"*Char*-lie! It's *me*-e!"

A full-throated, middle-contralto. Aileen had a middle contralto voice, too. But that voice was not—could not be—Aileen's voice. If it were Aileen, would she hand him over to the police?

As, by hypothesis, it was not Aileen, there was a danger amounting to certainty that the owner of the voice *would* hand him over to the police.

Seconds passed without any sound to give him a clue as to what was happening.

Then the sound of the front door being shut.

Within a minute or so he had evolved a feasible theory of his predicament. The girl has been given a latch-key, so she's one of Ennings's harem. She thinks he's cut a date with her, so she's gone off in a huff. If she's waiting for him on the landing—but she won't be! She's on latchkey terms and would curl herself up in the flat. Give her a couple of minutes to get clear.

When the two minutes had passed he slipped out of the flat, pausing only to shut the outer door as silently as possible. The main thing was to avoid being seen or heard leaving the flat.

No footsteps. No one on the staircase. By the time he reached the second floor, his confidence returned.

That table spread with a meal for two was nothing less than a first-class alibi, provided the body were not discovered in the next ten minutes or so. No man, he could point out, would be such a fool as to murder another in a flat when he knew that a guest was momentarily expected.

He had merely to pretend that he had seen the table when he entered the flat, and he could add that Ennings had explained that he was expecting a girl friend. He need not even bother to dodge the porter.

When Yawle reached the ground floor, the porter was not there to be dodged or not dodged, being occupied with a tenant who had arrived with luggage at another entrance. Yawle strode on.

In the miniature lounge the girl who resembled Aileen Daines was adjusting her make-up. Unaware of his presence, she snapped her bag, gathered up her shopping parcels and went out of the building.

Might be Ennings's girl friend, he reflected—but

without deep interest, for his ego was fully inflated. He had done what he had done—he had turned deadly peril to positive advantage. He would top it off by making use of the porter.

Luckily, he had a pen on him. He began to write a noncommittal message for Ennings, but found to his surprise that his hand was shaking. Never mind! His resourcefulness was equal to any emergency.

He found the porter at the third entrance.

"I've just left Mr. Ennings and I find that I've absent-mindedly pocketed his fountain-pen." It was a standard model, unidentifiable. He gave it to the porter, with a florin. "If I were you, I wouldn't return it until the morning. The fact is, porter, he is entertaining—well, let's say a *friend*!"

By bed-time, Yawle's confidence had ebbed. Again and again he reviewed his movements, with increasing alarm. He had got clean away, but could he be dragged back? He ticked off the items.

The first person to see him enter the block had been the girl, but she obviously had not noticed him and could be ignored. Then the old lady who had looked at him like a spider. She might or might not remember him enough to give a description.

Then there was that wretched boy—almost certainly a Boy Scout obsessed with stairs and footsteps, who would love telling the police everything.

With that sterling alibi of the dinner table it would be safe to come forward, unsafe to hang back.

"There's the boy, the middle-aged woman, and the girl—all three saw you entering the building at about seven-ten, Mr. Yawle?" Chief Inspector Karslake was making notes as he spoke. "Can you remember what they looked like?"

"The boy I didn't notice—an ordinary boy of about ten or so. The woman, smallish, about fifty, old-fashioned, but not exactly old, round sort of face. The girl—middle twenties, about my height, dark, good-looking, well-marked eyebrows, slim, quietly dressed. But I'm sure she didn't know I was there—if you're thinking of asking these people whether they saw me."

"It's only for checking up with others," Karslake assured him. "Please go on, Mr. Yawle."

"I went to the flat. Ennings opened the door. He was in a dinner jacket and told me he was expecting a friend to dinner. The way he said it, I guessed it was a girl. He showed me the dining-room—I suppose so that I shouldn't think he was stalling me—cold supper set for two. I said I would only keep him a few minutes. As soon as we got into his sitting-room the phone rang. He answered briefly and cut off."

Yawle waited while Karslake wrote. He had not anticipated that everything he said would be noted.

"And then you both sat down and discussed your business?"

"If we are to be literal, I didn't sit down—wanted to make it clear that I wasn't going to stick around."

The next bit was tricky. In the night he had worked out that the porter might have noticed when Ennings's guest went upstairs—that it must have been while he was in the flat.

"We were about half-way through our business when his girl turned up."

"And he got up to let her in?"

Confound the man with his passion for footling little details! Be careful to tell no unnecessary lies.

"She let herself in with a latchkey. I said I'd just write out a note and then——"

"Half a minute. Don't think I'm niggling, Mr.

Yawle. The fact is, we use everything an honest witness tells us to check on the people who are not public spirited and may be hiding something. How did you know someone had come in with a latchkey if you were shut up in a room talking business?"

"Ennings had one ear listening for that latchkey." Yawle managed a realistic snigger. "He got up, spoke to her, said he would be with her in a few minutes."

Karslake passed him a chart of Ennings's sitting-room.

"Will you show me on that chart where you were standing when he went to speak to the girl?"

There was only one spot where one could stand to talk to a man sitting as Ennings had sat.

"On the hearthrug—here."

"Could you identify the girl, Mr. Yawle?"

"Oh, no—no! Certainly not!"

"But you must have seen her if you were standing there!" It was a statement rather than a question, and Yawle shrank from contradicting.

"Well—yes—but—in these circumstances, Inspector, I simply can't make a statement involving someone else unless I'm sure of what I say."

"You couldn't put it better, Mr. Yawle. All I want you to tell me now is what you saw. To begin with, you saw it was a girl and not a man. Tall or short? Fair or dark?"

"I don't think we need winkle it out that way. I can go as far as this—she was of the same physical type as the girl I noticed in the hall when I was coming in. But I cannot state that she was the same girl."

It would be better, he had decided, not to add that he had also seen the girl when he was leaving the building.

"From your description of the girl in the hall the

thing a man would notice first would be those eyebrows," persisted Karslake.

"Y-yes. But——"

"Was she in evening dress?"

"No."

"Same sort of clothes as the girl in the hall, eh?" As Yawle did not deny it, "Very natural that you won't state it's the same girl, because you aren't quite positive. Very proper attitude, if I may say so. Where did Ennings park the girl in the flat?"

"I don't know. He came back to me. I wanted to make that note. I'd forgotten my pen and he lent me his. I went on talking a minute or so and absent-mindedly pocketed his pen. When I got downstairs—which I suppose was about half-past seven—I looked for the porter and asked him to return the fountain-pen——" Yawle repeated the snigger "—*in the morning.*"

Karslake had the air of an Inspector who is not only satisfied but even grateful.

"I think that's about all, Mr. Yawle. We shall round up the boy and the woman on the stairs so that you can identify each other. The local police will probably want you for the inquest. Otherwise, I don't suppose we shall trouble you——" he pressed a bell push "—if you'll be good enough to give us your fingerprints before you go."

A junior entered with a frame and Yawle obliged.

"As far as I know," he said when the process had been completed, "I didn't leave any finger-prints in the flat. Don't think I touched anything except that fountain-pen."

"But look at it from our point of view, Mr. Yawle," Karslake was urbane and even confidential. "Until we've taken your prints we can't prove that it wasn't you who had dinner with Ennings."

"Dinner with Ennings?" echoed Yawle, genuinely puzzled.

"Well, supper if you like, as it was cold stuff. There were prints other than those of the deceased on the cutlery, the plates, the glasses, some of the dishes—someone who doesn't take salt or pepper but fairly shovels the sugar on a sweet."

"D'you mean that meal was eaten?" gasped Yawle.

"You bet it was! Look here, I'm not supposed to show this, but you'll see it at the inquest tomorrow."

Karslake displayed photographs of the dining-room and of the table, of the debris of a meal consumed by two persons. Yawle observed particularly the fairy glasses that had held the trifle. The glasses in the photograph were opaque, with nothing showing above the rims. Before consumption the trifle had topped the rim and the canned peach had topped the trifle.

Yawle left Scotland Yard, dazed to the point of being but barely aware of his surroundings. That dinner had been untouched when he left the flat. As Ennings was dead, he could not possibly have had dinner with the girl. Therefore, somebody else had dinner with the girl —which was absurd.

Alternatively, the flat had been burgled after the girl had gone. The burglars, notwithstanding the presence of a corpse in the flat, had sat down to a meal—which was even more absurd.

Which all proved that the dinner had not been eaten when, in point of fact, it had been eaten.

That it removed all danger from himself was scarcely heeded. That photograph gave him a creeping doubt of his own sanity. He had read of eye-witnesses making wholly false statements in wholly good faith. In some amazing way he must have seen an untouched meal when he was really looking at the debris of a meal.

That meal cropped up again at the inquest. One of the jurymen, unsupported by the others, challenged Yawle's evidence in a question to the Coroner.

"How do we know that this meal was eaten after Mr. Yawle had left the flat? It might have been eaten before —I mean, it might have been lunch, or anything. I'm not suggesting it was, but as it's important evidence I think we ought to have that point cleared up."

"I think I can help there, sir," said Yawle. "When the deceased took me into his dining-room I happened to notice particularly two fairy glasses containing trifle, with a canned peach on the top. If the police can confirm that, I saw the meal laid out before it was consumed."

The police could confirm that statement. The jury returned a verdict of murder against a person unknown, with a rider indicating the young woman who had entered the flat with a latchkey at approximately seven-twenty.

The boy was found some six weeks later. He had spent a couple of nights with an uncle, one of the tenants, who suddenly remembered the fact and reported it with profuse apologies. The boy had gone back to boarding school at Brighton: the incident had utterly passed from his mind, and he failed to identify Yawle.

The elderly lady with the parcel was another unexpected stumbling block. When appeals through Press and radio failed to elicit response, the Yard was ready to believe that she was an invention of Yawle's, prompted by a desire to tie the time of his presence at the flat at both ends. Innocent people often did that kind of thing.

The porter was interviewed again and again. His

story remained sufficiently consistent. It was his busy time, dodging from one of the three entrances to another. There had never been any trouble with the police—they weren't that kind of tenant, and he was not given to observing their actions. He had not seen Mr. Yawle until he made his request concerning the fountain-pen—which was close to seven-thirty.

He had certainly noticed a young woman sitting in the hall-lounge round about ten past seven. That was nothing unusual. He had only noticed her because, as he passed, she was fiddling with her bag and dropped something, but picked it up before he could do it for her. He mentioned her eyebrows and her dress, which was not the expensive kind.

The dragnet went out through the West End, though from the description of the porter and of Yawle, she was not likely to be found in any of the bars or night-clubs. The search became intensive, was carried to the theatres, including the dress circles and stalls, with the result that, some six weeks after the inquest, Yawle was asked to accompany a plain-clothes man and wait outside a City office about lunch-time.

Out of the office came Aileen Daines.

"Hullo, Dennis!" She shook hands with frank friendliness. "I'm so glad to see you—I was going to write. You see, Leonard and I—yes, at Easter."

When she had gone, Yawle rejoined the plain-clothes man.

"You saw her speak to me. She is not the one we want. I know her very well indeed."

The porter, at the same time on the next day, was not so positive. By a majority vote, as it were, of his muddled recollections, he decided that he did not think this young lady was that young lady.

"All the same, there's the bare possibility that this

young lady *is* that young lady," said Karslake when he was discussing the report with his staff. "Used to be Yawle's girl, eh? There might be some tangled sex stuff there. We haven't enough to sail in with a request for her dabs. Now, if one of you boys could manage to watch her eating—when she isn't with her young man —we might get a line."

None of them did see her eating, but one of them obtained her fingerprints without her knowledge. And that dropped her out of the case—and dropped the case itself into the Department of Dead Ends.

As weeks lengthened into months, Yawle ceased to worry about his sanity in the matter of the dinner which could not possibly have been—but had been—eaten. He still carried the crystal of cyanide in a dummy petrol lighter, but it had become a talisman rather than a menace.

Learning that Ennings's estate had been proved at £60,000 he went to see Gronston's, who gladly gave him details of the royalties paid to Lanberry's. Yawle brought an action against the estate for balance of royalties withheld by a fraudulent device.

The action was heard in the following spring. Detective-Inspector Rason was present, not because he expected to find in the public gallery the girl who had murdered Ennings, but because it was a routine duty to keep contact with the principals in an unsolved crime.

The hearing was very brief, for there was in effect no defence. Yawle obtained judgment for some four thousand pounds and his costs. The judge remarked that the deceased had behaved as an unscrupulous scoundrel and that Hendricks, his shabby little clerk who survived him, would do well to examine his own conscience.

Rason decided to do a little examining of the clerk's conscience himself, for he had the glimmer of an idea. Over a pint of beer and a sandwich Hendricks was willing to talk.

"I knew there was going to be a rumpus when Mr. Yawle turned up at my room," said Hendricks. "I gave the guv'nor the wire, but he only laughed at me."

"When did Mr. Yawle turn up at your room?" asked Rason.

"I dunno—not the date anyhow. Must've been about a week before the guv'nor copped out."

That was the sort of thing Rason was hoping for. What business had Yawle transacted with Ennings when he knew that Ennings had been cheating him? No business. He had gone to demand restitution. And had borrowed Ennings's fountain-pen to make a note of it? Rats!

Barking up the wrong tree, mused Rason. Proving that Yawle quarrelled with Ennings and killed him, whereas the job is to find the girl and prove she did.

Back in the office he was reluctant to admit that he had wasted his morning. He tried hard to squeeze a girl into the discovery that Yawle had known that Ennings was swindling him. No link-up.

Start with the girl, now! She comes in with a latch-key, has her dinner, and then knifes him. Why? She must've expected him to get fresh. Can't pull the dewy innocent with the latchkey in her bag. Suppose *she* was an inventor, too? In the sitting-room she finds something, proving that Ennings has been buying her the stockings out of her own money?

The next morning he paddled back to Hendricks.

"Have you got on your books a girl, middle-twenties, height about five-six, thickish eyebrows——"

"I've never seen any of 'em except Mr. Yawle. And

we got no girls. Only a couple o' widows, legatees of course."

"Let's have the widows!"

Mrs. Siegman lived in Hampstead, was middle-aged and had virtually no eyebrows. Mrs. Deaker lived in Surbiton, which was an hour's drive out of London, allowing for traffic. With some difficulty Rason found a small house with a brick wall surrounding the garden on the outskirts of the suburb.

The door was opened by a good-looking girl in the middle-twenties, height about five-six, dark, with well-defined eyebrows.

"Are you Mrs. Deaker?"

"No. Mrs. Deaker is in town. I'm her companion and at the moment her domestic staff too. Do you want to leave a message?"

Rason presented his official card.

"Oh!" said the girl, and Rason decided to spring it on her.

"What were you doing in Barslade Mansions, Westminster, the night Charles Ennings was killed?"

"Oh!" said the girl again. "I'm not going to tell you anything until I have a lawyer."

"In that case I'm afraid you'll have to come with me to Scotland Yard," said Rason.

He was with her while she packed a suit-case and left a note for her employer, kept her within arm's reach while he telephoned the Yard. On the journey the only admission she made was that her name was Margaret Halling. On arrival at the Yard she made no objection to having her fingerprints taken.

Some three hours later Dennis Yawle turned up at Scotland Yard in response to a request by telephone. Some five minutes previously Margaret Halling's em-

ployer had arrived with a lawyer. All three, with some half a dozen others, were enduring time in a waiting-room.

Detective-Inspector Rason thanked Yawle profusely, took him along a corridor behind the waiting-room.

"I want you to look through this little panel, Mr. Yawle—they can't see you—and tell me if there's anybody in the room you recognise."

Yawle looked through the panel. A smile broadened.

"Yes," he said. "I shall never forget that face! That is the elderly lady whose parcel I picked up on the stairs."

"Well, I'm——" Rason was more astonished than he had been for a long time. "Excuse me, Mr. Yawle." In his agitation he pushed Yawle back to the panel, put his hand on the crown of Yawle's head, and gently twisted until Yawle could be presumed to have a view of the seat in the window.

This time there was no broad smile. Rason had the impression that he saved Yawle from subsiding to the floor.

"That's the girl with the eyebrows—the girl I saw in the hall."

"And she's the girl you saw when she let herself in with the latchkey?"

"I don't know. I said at the time I couldn't be sure the girls were the same."

"That's all right, Mr. Yawle—we never lead a witness," said Rason unblushingly. He was now in extremely high spirits, for he had had another glimmer. "Your statement in my file says they were of similar type. That passes the buck to us."

They went to Chief Inspector Karslake's room. The chair at the roll-top desk was placed at Rason's disposal, with Karslake on his left, for this was Rason's

case, and his own room was too much of a museum for interviews.

"Well, I suppose the first thing to do," hinted Karslake, when he had heard the news, "is to have the girl in for a formal identification."

"No, it isn't, sir," said Rason, picking up Karslake's house telephone.

"Mrs. Deaker, in the waiting-room—ask her if she would like to see me. If so, bring her in."

"Mr. Yawle," said Rason. "This old girl has given Mr. Karslake a good deal of trouble, one way and another." Karslake's surprise changed to profound disapproval, as Rason went on, "If she hands us anything you know to be phoney, I'd be grateful if you'd chip in and flatten her out."

Yawle assented politely. The 'old woman' presented no problem. She could do nothing but confirm his statement.

Mrs. Deaker chose to brave the detective without the support of the lawyer, who was earmarked for Margaret Halling.

"I think you have seen this gentleman before, Mrs. Deaker?" Rason indicated Yawle.

"Not to my recollection," answered Mrs. Deaker. "Perhaps if you were to tell me his name——?"

"At Barslade Mansions, Westminster, on the evening of January 17th, 1933, this gentleman retrieved a parcel you had dropped on the staircase."

"Did he! Then it was very kind of him, and it is ungracious of me to forget."

"We advertised in the Press and on the radio, asking you to come forward, Mrs. Deaker," said Rason severely.

"I remember those advertisements. I didn't realise you meant me!" She glared at Yawle. "Did you

describe me as an *elderly* woman? That's what the advertisement said!" Before Yawle could excuse himself, she went on, "I suppose I do seem elderly to a man of your age. However, if we may consider the incident of the parcel as closed I would like to tell the police about Margaret Halling, my companion. She was there solely because my taxi brought her there. I was dining with a friend. Her train home from Waterloo was not until eight-ten. It was a cold night and I told her to sit in the lounge by the radiator until it was time to leave."

"Who was the friend with whom you were dining, Mrs. Deaker?"

"The man who was murdered. Mr. Ennings. But of course, you must know all about him, as you're still looking for the murderer. Now that we have mentioned the subject, you may wish me to account for my own movements, though they are of no significance, or I would have reported them.

"Mr. Ennings was a friend—a very intimate friend—before I married, somewhat injuduciously, the man who invented the Deaker commutator. Mr. Ennings handled my husband's affairs. In recent years, after his death, Mr. Ennings and I—Mr. Ennings and I resumed our friendship, which was cemented by the fact that my husband had made him trustee.

"Mr. Ennings telephoned me in the morning that he might be detained at some special meeting or other. As I was doing a day's shopping, I was to come—he would have a cold meal prepared—and I was not to wait dinner for him after seven-thirty.

"As to the parcel incident, I never enter a lift unless there is a responsible-looking man in charge. I used the staircase, which took a long time—no doubt because I am *elderly*! I duly waited until seven-thirty, and then

I sat down to dinner by myself. I waited in the flat until a little after nine-thirty and then caught the ten-five home."

Rason had taken from the dossier the photographs of the debris of the meal.

"When did you see Mr. Ennings?"

"Obviously, I didn't see him at all."

"How did you obtain entry to the flat?"

"I lifted the knocker, as there was a light in the hall." Her words were laboured as she went on, "I thought I had sufficiently emphasised the fact of our friendship. I have a latchkey. Here it is." She took it from her bag and gave it to Rason. "I went to the sitting-room, but the door was locked. I knocked, then called his name. Then I looked about the flat, shut the front door and went into the dining-room to wait for him. Once, I thought I heard the front door being closed, but it was a false alarm, so I sat down and had my dinner."

Yawle had reached forward and snatched from Rason's desk the photograph of the debris of the meal.

"I don't think so, Mrs. Deaker!" cried Yawle. "Look at this photograph. Two persons ate that dinner!"

They were glaring at each other.

"Half a minute, Mr. Yawle!" interposed Rason. "I thought Mr. Karslake had told you everything! Did he forget to tell you that there was *only one set of finger-prints on those dishes?*"

"Then they must be mine!" sighed Mrs. Deaker. "I had hoped to escape this public humiliation. The degrading truth is that I can eat—and I often do—as much as two men! By nine, I concluded that Mr. Ennings must have had his dinner. So I—I—I really *did*——"

Rason left Mrs. Deaker floundering in a whirlpool of social shame.

"Well, Yawle, let's get back to that young girl you saw in the flat, whom you can't *quite* identify with the young girl you saw in the hall. Eyebrows an' all, too! Or would you rather ask Mrs. Deaker some questions about that sitting-room door *that was locked on the inside?* At about twenty past seven, as near as makes no matter to you, Yawle!"

But Yawle possessed a talisman in a dummy petrol lighter that warded off all further assaults on his dignity.

The Lost Village

CECIL M. WILLS

HE was lying naked, face-down on the top of what, from afar, had seemed to be an inaccessible peak. The 'He fell among thieves' theme had hardly entered my mind before it was dispelled by the sight of his clothes, neatly folded. I coughed.

Without moving he said, "Well?"

"Oh, nothing. Thought I'd better let you know you were no longer alone. Didn't want to embarrass you, you know."

He rolled over and sat up. A lean, sun-tanned face; bright blue eyes beneath over-shaggy brows. Might have been fifty or a little more. Probably a pleasant face when bereft of its present frown.

"What the hell do you want?" he growled. I felt aggrieved.

"Nothing. Nothing, at least, from you. I came up here for exercise and the view. I've had the one; now I'm having the other—rather an unexpected one, if I may say so."

A heated argument had arisen in which Verriner had threatened to pitch me over the cliff. He seemed to look upon my presence at his sun-bath as a graceless and wanton intrusion. Suddenly he burst into a roar of laughter and held out his hand.

"Don't mind me," he said jovially. "It's just my way; but it's soon over."

And now, some years later, my thoughts returned to

that first meeting as I glanced at Verriner's face, set in obstinate lines.

In those bygone days I had been wandering over that portion of the globe known vaguely as Central Europe —and as vaguely owned; careless whither I went or where I stopped. Our acquaintanceship, inauspiously begun, had developed along pleasant lines and we had journeyed together for some weeks. I had found him an interesting and knowledgeable companion; but not one with whom to argue lightly.

History is said to repeat itself. It may be so. Certain it is that once again we were together in those parts; but this time in his car and travelling in luxury.

I referred to the map. Yes, I was right; we should not have branched right several miles back. I had pointed this out at the time, but Verriner had thought otherwise. He had said so—emphatically.

The road had become narrower and altogether rougher. Mountains towered above us on either side, seeming to press in upon us as the car crawled in low gear up the steepening gradient. Overhead a brazen sun in a vivid blue sky poured its pitiless rays upon us like a vast spotlight, rendering the mountain faces the darker by contrast.

A sudden movement, far above us, caught my eye. A giant boulder detached itself from the hillside and, gathering momentum and a satellite train of lesser rocks, bore down upon us with the speed and purpose of an avalanche.

Verriner pulled up with a jerk, but made no move to leave the car. I could but emulate him, hoping that I appeared as unperturbed as he.

It was all over in a few seconds. When but a few yards away the boulder struck a projecting rock, swerved to one side and crashed into the road im-

mediately ahead of the car. A cloud of blinding dust arose. The rocks in the boulder's wake showed no such discrimination; and for a while which seemed an eternity—though it can have been no more than a few seconds—we were the centre of a hail of missiles.

We escaped with a few minor cuts; but the car had run its last mile. Not that it signified; for the road ahead was completely blocked.

I looked up in the direction from which the boulder had come. Far above us, sharply silhouetted against the sky, crouched an enormous cat.

"Infernal nuisance," grumbled Verriner as he groped for what was left of our baggage. "Have to walk, that's all. What sort of a country is this, anyway, to allow that kind of thing to happen? Ought to be warning boards at least. On a *main* road, too!" He glared at me, challenge in his whole attitude. I had sense enough to keep quiet.

"Have to walk," he repeated, collecting a rucksack and some bags while I followed his example. "Come on, we may have some way to go."

He swung off at a great pace, scrambling over the cause of our disaster with the agility of a mountain goat. Despite his age, Verriner had the energy of a young man.

It seemed to me that we toiled upwards for hours. The road grew ever steeper, the sun more intense. Finally came temporary relief; and I, for one, was thankful. The road ceased abruptly. Ahead rose a rocky slope, only less steep than the flanking hills.

Verriner sat down on a rock and burst into a roar of laughter.

"Looks as though you were right after all!" he bellowed. "This——" he waved his hand at the obstruction—"must have been here for years. Look at

the stuff growing on it—damn nearly a young forest."

I grinned. Any resentment I had felt vanished like dew before the sun. It was impossible to be angry with Verriner when this mood was upon him.

"A landslide, I suppose?" I ventured weakly. "Funny no one has done anything about it. This road must lead somewhere—or must have done so once."

I pulled out the tattered remains of the map. The only decipherable portion was that over which we had travelled before our mishap.

Verriner jumped to his feet.

"Let's get on, then; too far to go back. May find a hut or something, once we've tackled this young mountain. Or maybe there's a full-sized village—with another road on the further side of the pass."

There was nothing about the climb worthy of remark; but the sun was setting when at last we reached the crest. Here, surprisingly, the road or what had once been the road—now thickly overgrown with moss and weeds—again lay before us, winding through a broad and verdant valley which sloped gently upwards. On either side the mountains still towered to the skies. About a mile ahead lay a cluster of houses. There was no one in sight.

"Well," said Verriner impatiently, "it's no good standing here gaping. Uninhabited or not, those huts are better than a night on the bare mountain! It'll soon be dark. Come on!"

I nodded and, picking up my bundle with reluctance, followed in his wake. It was when we were within a few hundred yards of the village that I first thought I saw a movement. Someone, or something, seemed to slip from the nearest house to a neighbouring one. But when we reached the village there was not a soul to be seen.

"What about having a look inside?" I suggested as we drew level with the first house. Verriner shook his head.

"Let's get our bearings first. Reconnoitre, as it were. Then we can pick on the most likely-looking hovel. The whole place is obviously deserted." And indeed no smoke came from the chimneys.

We were about half-way along the village street when I heard a faint sound behind me. I glanced back—and stood rooted in my tracks.

Creeping stealthily towards us were the strangest beings I have ever seen. There were seven or eight of them. Long, ragged grey tresses streamed from their heads as they shuffled almost noiselessly nearer and nearer. They were half-crouching and their skins, devoid of clothing, were brown and crossed with a thousand wrinkles. Their hands, with long, claw-like nails, were thrust before them.

But it was above all their faces that filled me with horror. Wide open yet sightless eyes seemed to be fixed upon us. Mouths agape displayed broken, fang-like teeth or gaps where teeth had been. Their expressions were indescribable. Evil, cruelty, insanity—all were there.

Still they advanced, these travesties of women; silently shuffling with something diabolically purposeful in their advance.

I glanced at Verriner and found that he was staring incredulously in front of him. Another line of similar monstrosities was approaching from this direction. They were also shuffling out of the houses on either side—perhaps some thirty in all.

"What d'you make of it, Verriner?" I whispered. There was that in the pregnant silence that forbade open speech. He answered in the same manner:

"God knows! I suppose they are—or were—human. They look more like wild beasts."

Even our whispering reached the over-acute ears of these horrible, blinded creatures; for their shuffling advance became more rapid and, even as we watched, they formed a large circle about us each at arm's length from her neighbour. The circle completed, they stood motionless for a while, their heads turning this way and that, snuffing the air. Then, with the stealthy movements of a stalking cat, they drew nearer, the circle narrowing until they were shoulder to shoulder. Not a sound escaped them; this was a manœuvre that needed no direction; this was an oft repeated plan of campaign.

And now the whole circle moved slowly along the village street. We stood our ground until those behind us were actually in contact with our backs. Slowly, relentlessly the pressure increased, forcing us forward.

"This is the maddest thing that ever happened," I broke out. "For God's sake let's do something!"

Verriner had completely regained his composure.

"What do you propose?" he countered. "Even if we felt like lashing out against women—for I suppose they are women—what would be the use? They're thirty to two; we know that we are unarmed—but we don't know what they can do with those revolting claws."

He was right, of course. But for my part I moved quickly enough to avoid contact with these obscene creatures who were purposefully herding us whither they would. It was their silence which most affected me; the silence of the stalker before the kill.

Suddenly Verriner addressed them in ringing tones. What language he used I do not know; but it mattered nothing. No sign of comprehension, no gleam of intelligence illumined those evil masks.

At the end of the village they stopped. Those forming

that part of the circle nearest to a large, stone-built house fanned out against its walls, leaving the doorway clear between their ranks. The door stood open. The rest, as silently as before, pressed upon us, driving us towards the house.

"All right," said Verriner, "if they want us to get inside there that suits me. Perhaps it's just their way of showing us hospitality." He walked briskly forward and stepped across the threshold. Hardly had I followed him before the door was slammed behind us and we heard the sounds of a heavy bar being dropped into position. It was as dark as the pit.

Verriner produced a cigarette lighter. By its feeble flame we could make out that we stood in a bare passage. Doorways, open on either side, gave on to rooms as bare. There were no windows or, if once there had been, they had long since been boarded over.

At the end of the passage lay a large room which had at one time been used as a kitchen. A wide fireplace, in which still lay the ashes and charred logs of a long-dead fire, occupied the greater part of one wall. The remaining three, but for the doorway, were unbroken. The room, like its fellows, was unfurnished.

The light flickered and went out.

"Damn!" said Verriner. "And of course you wouldn't have one."

For the first time in my life I regretted that I did not smoke.

"Haven't got a darned match," he went on. "That's the worst of depending on these things. All right when you've got a car—and petrol; but no sort of use now. Damn those hags; they've quite given me the creeps." Then his mood changed. His customary roar of laughter shook the walls.

"Of all the ridiculous adventures," he chuckled,

"this is the craziest. Here am I, with big-game hunting experiences in half a dozen countries, herded into a pig-pen by a parcel of naked, unarmed old hags. I don't think I shall add this little story to my repertoire. And such revolting, obscene specimens!"

I joined in his laugh and hoped that it sounded convincing.

"Well," I agreed, "I must say I prefer their room to their company. But I don't see what else we could have done. Even without those disgusting talons of theirs they could have pulled us down and strangled us by sheer force of numbers." My voice shook a little as I posed the question which was uppermost in my mind. "What . . . what d'you think they intend to do with us, Verriner?"

"The Lord knows! Maybe they're simply showing us their kind of hospitality. At any rate they haven't attempted to harm us as yet. All the same, I don't much like this 'guest house'. The absence of windows and the barred door make it uncomfortably like a prison. Of course, since they all appear to be blind, they'd have no use for windows; and it may be that they boarded them up long ago for warmth. Oh well, we shall know their intentions before long."

Fumbling in the dark we unpacked such baggage as had survived the wreck. There was little enough of which to make a meal; for camping out had been no part of our programme. But Verriner, with his usual foresight, had insisted that we always carried some dry provisions and a flask, in case of breakdown. For a while we ate in silence, our backs propped against a wall.

"Verriner," I began at length, "that landslide. Surely it's strange that no one has done anything about it, in all the years that must have passed since it happened?"

"Not so strange, really," he answered thoughtfully.

"I've been thinking it over. Ever since the First World War this part of the country has been very thinly populated. Such villages as were not razed to the ground by the Hun as 'reprisals' were, for the most part, denuded of their inhabitants—for forced labour—under the same excuse. Wait a bit; I seem to remember something in that connection. Something to do with these parts. But it was long ago. Let me see now. . . ."

For a while he sat in silence while I strained my ears to detect possible operations by our captors. I could hear nothing.

"Got it!" he exclaimed at last. "I heard the story from a nomadic shepherd in Cenatowitcz. Must be many years ago. I got stranded for the night in a little village high up in the mountains. Not more than half a dozen hovels clinging to the side of the hill. The Lord knows what the sheep found to eat; but I gathered that the clan were birds of passage; moved from place to place as the grazing gave out. I imagine that they had several such 'villages' at their disposal; and well they might have, for the huts were nothing but the crudest daub and wattle.

"This shepherd and I were housed for the night in one of these shacks. I, for one, couldn't sleep for the bites of bugs; and so we got into conversation." He broke off and seemed to be lost in a reverie.

"About the shepherd's story?" I ventured.

"Oh yes. Funny yarn altogether. Seems that besides the Hun the country was infested with marauding, irregular gangs from across one or other of the several borders. You know how it was: neighbouring states would be allies one day and enemies the next. Villages were always changing hands.

"His story was a bit hard to follow; partly because he

was more or less a half-wit; partly because he used a dialect in which I was far from fluent. But from what I could piece together it seems that a chap was leading one of these guerilla bands up a valley with the intention of attacking a village in the mountains.

"Some partisans, high up in the hills, amused themselves by rolling rocks down on the invader. Made a good job of it too. The partisans, of course, came from here, there and everywhere. But that didn't worry the leader of the gang—who, with some of his trusty men, escaped the slaughter. He was out for blood. So he proceeded to the village which had been his original goal and set about giving them a lesson in guerilla warfare. There was little resistance, since all the men of military age had been conscripted. Shooting old men, women and children must have palled on our friend after a while, for he decided to try something quite new. Here's where the story gets a bit vague. But it would seem that he rounded up all but girls of under seven years of age, carted them down the valley and, after tying them in bundles, laid them out on the road. Carefully explaining his plan to them, he and his men placed charges under several well-chosen boulders high up on either side of the valley, laid time fuses and withdrew.

"Neat, wasn't it? The inevitable landslide would not only destroy the evidence, but block the way to the village. In those days, remember, hundreds of natives had been deported or shot. I don't suppose there was anyone left to worry about their fate."

He paused and a question rose to my lips; but he anticipated it.

"Yes, I know," he continued with a touch of impatience. "If they were all killed, how did the story get out? They weren't. One man managed to wriggle

free after the party had left. My informant. He didn't stop to see if he could find any others whom he might be able to help. Not he! He ran down the valley for his life, leaving his pals to their fate. Maybe brooding on that turned him into a half-wit. Or perhaps he was born one—and it never happened! Ah well," he concluded, "it's a damned unpleasant story and very possibly has no foundation in fact. And it was all long ago. Still, this village——"

"What was the point about the girl children?" I asked. "I didn't follow that."

"Simple enough, isn't it?" growled Verriner. "Given, that is, that you can admit the damned sadistic mind of the chap who led the guerillas. There have been counterparts. Belsen, for instance. A child of seven's old enough to scrounge around for a bit of food; not old enough to make tracks across the mountains in search of problematical neighbours. I imagine that fellow got the hell of a kick for quite a long time afterwards—thinking about those children. . . . But," he added, "there was nothing about blinding them. Probably a last minute inspiration."

A cold chill ran through me.

"You think," I began, "that possibly this is the village in question—that these seemingly old women . . . are . . .?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. But there's another point which lends colour to the theory. The old shepherd said that only the girls were spared—boys of all ages being wiped out with their parents. Potential soldiers who might take reprisals when they grew old enough, I suppose. Personally I can't think of any other explanation of a village like this, cut off from the outside world and peopled with blind women. No wonder they've gone bestial. Just image what it would be like—a

whole lot of kids, blinded and left to fend for themselves. What in hell would they live on? Each other, perhaps. Survival of the fittest. It doesn't bear thinking about."

I changed the subject hastily. "But surely this shepherd told the authorities before it was too late to do something about those children?"

Verriner made an impatient exclamation.

"Would you—if you had run for your life and left your friends to die? Besides which, as I have already explained, there probably weren't any 'authorities' in the district. And who would believe a half-wit, anyway? As for the partisans, I imagine that as soon as they'd brought off their little coup they got to hell out of the district. No, provided there's any truth in the story, I'm prepared to believe that, in the special circumstances, a village could be 'lost' like that . . . and the souls of its survivors too."

Shortly after this Verriner settled himself for the night and was soon asleep. As for me, I went over the whole story in my mind, visualising the life of those children and imagining untold horrors. It was an appalling picture. The struggle for existence; clothes wearing out with no source of replacement—possibly no desire to replace them. Who could say what a community of children, none of whom was more than seven years old, and blind at that, might do or become if left to their own devices. Lucky for Verriner that he had not my sensibility or power of imagination. He could sleep peacefully, while I——

But even I at last fell into an uneasy slumber of complete exhaustion, much troubled with evil dreams. I awoke suddenly, with the cries of the damned ringing in my ears. It was some time before I could disentangle fantasy from reality; then I realised that the sounds

were nothing more intimidating than the night cries of cats—though of an unbelievable volume.

Verriner awoke next morning in the best of spirits. A dim light filtered into the room by way of the wide chimney and we could discern each other as in a mist. Naturally he was the first to assess this light source at its potential value.

"Any chimney," he began without preamble, "that lets in that much light should, in the ordinary course of events, let out two such spare bodies as yours and mine."

His head and shoulders were already engulfed above the desolate hearth when a fumbling at the outer door brought him swiftly back into the room. Noiselessly opening the kitchen door, thus keeping the passage in our view, he signed to me to remain silent.

The outer door swung open, admitting a ray of sunshine which was immediately masked by advancing figures. Dim shapes, still progressing with that loathsome, noiseless shuffle, materialised before us. Silhouetted as they were, against the light of day, we could see that each one now carried a gleaming knife.

Gestures which it were wise to obey brought us to the sharp contrast of dazzling sunlight; and it took a few moments for our eyes to adapt themselves to the rapid transition.

A semi-circle of the creatures squatted before us, all armed with knives. Seated in their midst was a woman, somewhat younger—or, perhaps, merely better fed—than the remainder of her court. She had an unmistakable air of authority. Her expression was even more evil than that of those around her.

She spoke. Though I understood not a word, there was something macabre, something sinister about her

utterance which chilled me in spite of the warmth of the sun. Later, when we had been returned to our prison, Verriner gave me his impression.

"I'm not easily influenced," he began. "In fact, I've always considered myself a pretty hard nut to crack. But—well, I can't hope to convey to you the effect that she-devil had on me when she began to speak. Imagine a creature with an expression compounded of all evil, uttering obscenities and blasphemies quite unrepeatable—God knows how she learned them—in a dialect now almost extinct and with the *manner and pronunciation of a child*! That, I think, gave the final touch of horror."

He then gave me the upshot of the conversation, though he refused to give me details. These women were cannibals—when other food sources failed. We were to die. That was all he told me.

We set to work on a plan of escape. Verriner decided that I should remain in the house while he reconnoitred the position outside. I gave him a helping shoulder and he disappeared up the wide chimney with an energy which was peculiarly comforting. After a brief interval he returned.

"Seems all right," he reported. "No one in sight. Thank the Lord those hell-cats are blind." He gave me a helping hand and we were soon crouching behind the wall of our late prison. Motioning me to remain, Verriner crept away on hands and knees.

Looking back on it now it strikes me as strange that all through the horrible episode we behaved as though our captors were able to see. Force of habit I suppose.

When Verriner returned he whispered in my ear:

"They're busy cutting the throats of cats in a compound down the street. Never seen so many cats; there must be hundreds of them—and enormous beasts at

that. Some sort of selective breeding I suppose. Now's our chance. Come on."

But we had underestimated our captors, some of whom must have been left on guard. Ignominiously brought back to our prison, at the knife's point, by a half-dozen of the creatures, we sat in silence in the gloom of our cell. Even the fall of night would offer no advantage; rather the reverse. We should be handicapped by darkness; not so our gaolers.

By this time my nerves were at breaking point; and Verriner's sang-froid, whether genuine or assumed, served only to deepen my own feelings of horror and foreboding.

That night he disappeared.

I must have slept from sheer exhaustion, as on the preceding night. When I awoke the semi-light of dawn again filtered into our prison and I realised that I was alone. A despairing search in the dark convinced me that he was not in the building, and I assumed that he had gone off on another reconnaissance. With what patience I could muster I sat down to await his return.

Time passed. I had no means of gauging it; for in the terrible circumstances in which we found ourselves I had forgotten to wind my watch. In the end I was forced to assume that some dire misfortune had befallen him and that I could no longer count upon his help. Even in my extremity I refused to entertain the thought that he had deserted me.

I felt unutterably lost and helpless. Verriner, though no younger, was a far more vigorous man than I; and possessed of great initiative. He was the type that leads as by a natural right. And, of course, he was far less sensitive than I.

After a period of intense foreboding and depression I decided that any action was better than passively

awaiting my fate. With difficulty I negotiated the chimney. Even as I did so it struck me as strange that our captors had overlooked this way of escape. But I suppose they were incapable of assessing it.

The sun was high overhead. No one was in sight. With but little hope and no preconceived plan I made my way cautiously behind the houses. I came upon what had once been a garden. It contained a vast crater, probably the result of long-distant bombing. This crater was almost filled with bones. Mostly, I thought, those of small animals—cats, dogs, goats or rabbits. But some, bleached white with the passage of time, were those of children.

And then I saw the horror. I see it now! Still articulated, and with particles of flesh adhering lay the arm bones of a human adult.

For what seemed an eternity I stood rooted to the ground in an ecstacy of terror. Was this why Verriner had failed to return? Then my own terrible danger drove from my mind all thoughts save those of escape. I flung myself flat on the ground and, most illogically, felt the better for my partial concealment. After a long survey which revealed no foes I crept in the direction of the pass.

I had nearly reached the end of the village when a groan arrested me. It came from a nearby house. I approached with extreme caution. Unlike our late prison this house had window openings, though the frames had long since rotted.

Inch by inch I raised my head until I could peer into the room. Lying on the floor, his feet bound together and one arm tied to his side, lay Verriner, bleeding from a dozen wounds. Where his other arm should have been was a rough, obviously self-adjusted bandage made from his shirt. He was alone.

Fearing a trap I dropped to the ground and crouched there, shaking. From time to time groans escaped my former companion's lips; there was no other sound. Finally, plucking up courage, I raised myself and whispered his name. He turned his head at once and his eyes lit up.

"Good lad!" he said with a twisted smile. "I knew you'd find me somehow. Couldn't have lasted much longer like this. If you can cut these damned native ropes I believe I could, with your help, manage to get away."

"Is there anyone elsé in the house?" I asked; for it would have been sheer bravado to enter without making certain that he was alone.

"No," he replied shortly, and I thought I could detect a change in his manner. However, I made up my mind to take the appalling risk and had actually placed one knee on the window-sill when I heard footsteps—shuffling footsteps—approaching the door of the room. In a flash I had dropped to the ground. I realised the danger of remaining where I was; yet to attempt to crawl away would be as risky.

The groans began again and I could hear Verriner speak between them. His voice was very faint but I could just catch the words.

"You damned hags," he said. "It would take more than two of you if I weren't tied up and bleeding like a stuck pig!"

I realised, of course, that his words were meant as a warning to me. One woman, even though armed with a knife, might have been taken unawares and overcome; but what chance had I against two? I felt a glow of gratitude towards Verriner. He might have called for my help, thereby endangering my safety. Instead he showed me clearly that there was nothing I could do.

As I crept away the groans increased. I told myself that he was purposely trying to cover any noise that I might make. I refused to let myself think that he was enduring further torture. It would have been sheer sentimentalism to indulge my fancies in this way and would only unfit me for my escape.

I had cleared the village when a shout of pain, ending in a choking sound chilled my blood. For a second I hesitated; then common sense once again came to my aid. If it were Verriner in his death agony there was nothing I could do; and it would show a poor sense of gratitude to render his sacrifice in vain.

Promising myself that I would obtain help for him—or at least revenge—as soon as I reached civilisation, I took to my feet and ran. Terror lent me wings. Even if the vile creatures heard me I felt that, blind as they were, I could out-distance them.

With lungs nearly bursting I reached the top of the pass and paused for an instant to look back. No one was in sight. With a muttered prayer of thanks I turned to plunge down the precipitous slope when an enormous cat sprang at my face, clawing wildly. It needed a superhuman effort to strangle the brute; but I managed it. It was only when I had reached the foot of the landslide that I realised that I had lost the sight of one eye. So I too, like Verriner, had paid for our intrusion into that hell of she-devils.

And what of Verriner? Had I indeed heard his death cry; or did he live on in that abominable place? That I shall never know. Who would have believed me if I had told them? Besides, had not Verriner himself, when I asked why the shepherd had not attempted to get help for the village, replied by asking me, "Would you?"

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